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University — Université: University of Alberta

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée: Ph.D.

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade: 1983

Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse:

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

'UNSĪ AL-ḤĀJJ
AND
THE *POÈME EN PROSE* IN MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

BY

©

MUḤAMMAD A. DEEB

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING, 1983

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR .... MUḤAMMAD A. DEEB

TITLE OF THESIS .... 'UNSĪ AL-ḤĀJJ AND THE POÈME EN PROSE IN MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED .... DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that before Arabic poetry reached the most recent phase of its articulation in the form of the *poème en prose*, modern Arabic poetry has followed a fairly long course of development and has been inevitably conditioned by a dialectics between the literary conventions of the diehard Classicists and Neo-Classicists, on the one hand, and, on the other, the successive and/or simultaneous modernizing efforts of the *Dīwān* Group, the *Mahjarites* in North America, the *Apollo* Group, the "Free" Verse Movement and the *Shi^{c}r Cénacle*. Notwithstanding the marked distinctions in their literary and ideological background, these movements called for and practised freedom from the fetters of classical prosody and the outmoded conventions of Arabic poetry, commonly known as *^{c}Amūd al-Shi^{c}r*.

In view of the contemporaneity and interrelationship between and the "Free" Verse and the *Shi^{c}r* movements, scholarship on modern Arabic poetry fails to draw the line between the two. The *Shi^{c}r* Movement, in our opinion, seeks to shape and establish a new *cénacle*. The leading poets and theoreticians of *Shi^{c}r* are revolutionaries who wish to cut themselves loose from the moorings of Arabic literary conventions and align themselves--consciously, that is--with the cause of contemporary poetry in the west. The "Free" Verse Movement seems in retrospect to be no more than a bold variation on the traditional *qaṣīda*. Contrary to all claims, the poets of this movement have failed to bring about a new species of poetry; they all have conceived and experimented with verse based on the *taf^{c}īla* (foot) at varying removes from the classical *qaṣīda*. The movement therefore constitutes an extension of traditional

poetry, not a break from it. The inherently conservative nature of this movement foreshadowed its early stagnation and demise.

The poème en prose as an independent literary genre has developed both outside the stronghold of Arabic Neo-Classicism and outside the confines of the "Free" Verse Movement of the late 1940s and 1950s. The choice of the Arabic designation "qaṣīdat al-nathr", besides being a direct translation of "poème en prose", is made in open defiance of Arabic aesthetics which has been invariably calculated to make prose as distinct as possible from verse.

We believe that this literary genre owes its genesis and development to the vision and western orientation of the Shi^c^r Society. Both Adonis (^c^Alī Aḥmad Sa^c^īd) and 'Unsī al-Ḥājj have been directly influenced, in their thoughts and formulations on the poème en prose, by Suzanne Bernard's historically and critically valuable study, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, 1959).

In spite of Adonis' substantial contribution to the genre at both levels of theory and praxis, al-Ḥājj--perhaps much more than his associates in the Shi^c^r Society--is to be credited with bringing the tradition of the poème en prose to public notice. We have focused on his first volume, Lan (Beirut, 1960) for two reasons: (a) it set the stage of Arabic poetry for a new birth as well as for a new orientation, and (b) it marks at once the climax of al-Ḥājj's rebellion, of his emotion, and of his quest for a new form or formlessness.

On the question of sources, it has been quite tempting to compile a huge bibliography on the subject, not only in Arabic and French, but also in English, Italian and Spanish (which attests to the significant place the *Shi^{c}r* Movement has had in international scholarship). At the different stages of planning and writing this study, however, we have been guided by two primary sources:

I. the creative and critical works of Adonis, al-Ḥājj, Yūsuf al-Khāl and Khālida Sa^{c}īd, and

II. the complete set of the *Shi^{c}r* review (1957-1964; 1967-1970) which illuminates the diachronic and synchronic aspects of the movement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though admittedly a pleasure for me - at the end of an unduly long journey - formal acknowledgement cannot render fully my gratitude to all who have helped me during the arduous gestation period of the thesis. Whatever merits may lie in the conceptual framework of this study, they are due largely to my mentor and supervisor, Professor Milan V. Dimić, whose many kindnesses have always transcended the cheerless frontiers of bureaucracy. Had it not been for his encouragement and continued help, my graduate studies as well as my doctoral research would have never been accomplished. I shall always owe him more than I can say.

The members of my committee: Dr. E.T. Blodgett, Dr. Saad El-Gabalawi, Dr. Baha Abu-Laban, and Dr. Earle Waugh have read this dissertation with care and offered valuable suggestions for its improvement. I acknowledge with pleasure my profound debt to Dr. Blodgett who read and discussed with me the manuscript at various stages and urged it into better sense and form.

I should like to extend, in an equally personal way, a special word of thanks to my external examiner, Professor Saad El-Gabalawi, whose participation, albeit late, in my doctoral work, has proven of vital importance to this study. Professor El-Gabalawi's thematic and technical recommendations have been adopted in the final version of this thesis.

In this company, a dear old friend should have his well-deserved honoured place; he tempered and enriched my revolutionary years in Berkeley, kindly accepted to participate in my candidacy examination, and was probably the first to stimulate my interest in the *poème en prose*: Dr. Mounah

Khouri, a scholar and a gentleman, for whom I have an abiding sense of gratitude.

Lest I forget, I appreciate the advice that has been extended to me from so far away, by Dr. Jamal Eddine Bencheikh of the University of Paris - VIII and Dr. Edward Said of Columbia University.

I am extremely grateful to the Canada Council for the Ph.D. scholarship award and for the travel grant that enabled me to do field research and interview leading Arab writers and poets in the Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. I wish also to thank the Killam Awards which provided me with a book fund during the early stages of my research.

I should like also to thank the members of the Inter-Library Loans Service of the University of Alberta, who tried their utmost to secure for me indispensable sources that otherwise would have remained inaccessible. My special thanks are furthermore due to the self-effacing administrative staff of my Department of Comparative Literature, especially Mrs. I. Brown, Ms. Shelagh Henderson, Mrs. Annie Thompson, and Mrs. Val Lubbers, Miss Brenda Stubbs found herself, perhaps unwittingly, faced with the strenuous demands of typing my manuscript--a task she did with exceptional care and responsibility.

Finally, I cannot reduce to words the deep gratitude I owe my wife Soraya, my son Tariq, and my daughter Sahar. They all, especially my wife, not without Sisyphean pain, have helped me in countless loving ways.

M.D.

Edmonton, 1983.

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TWO NOTES

1. Translation:

Verse translation is a proverbially difficult task, which is proven more so with al-Ḥājj's often enigmatic poèmes en prose. In both prose and verse, I have been guided variously by the spirit and letter of given texts as well as contexts. Between the literal and free translation, I have waded carefully through the Arabic material. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

2. Transliteration:

I have synthesized a pragmatic transliteration method, based on the system used in the new edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Arabic transliteration system used by the Library of Congress Processing Department (Bulletin 49, November 1958). Although absolute consistency is unattainable, transliteration in this study has been invariably subordinated to the rules of the Arabic language and the correct pronunciation of proper nouns and technical terminology.

INTRODUCTION

In Arabic literature, the *poème en prose* as an independent literary genre has developed both outside the stronghold of Arabic Neo-Classicism and outside the confines of the "Free" Verse Movement of the late 1940s and 1950s. The choice of the Arabic designation "qaṣīdat al-nathr," besides being a direct translation of "*poème en prose*," is made in open defiance of Arabic aesthetics which has been invariably calculated to make prose as distinct as possible from verse.

Adonis' initial attempt, which was followed uncritically by al-Ḥājj, to establish linkages between the *poème en prose* and forms of poetic prose in the native tradition may be viewed as a concession, more tactical perhaps than credal, to the susceptibilities of the conservative literary establishment and to Arab nationalism. I shall try to show that the literary genre owes its genesis and development to the vision and western orientation of the *Shi^{c}r* Society. Whereas the earlier movements in Arabic poetry, spanning the first four decades of this century, retained the essence of Arabic poetics, the *Shi^{c}r* Society, from the late 1950s onwards, has predicated its thrust on the rejection of Arabic poetics. The *Shi^{c}r* Movement has altered the general orientation and direction of poetry from its conventional Arabic matrix to the modern western tradition. As exemplified in the experimentations of the *Shi^{c}r* Movement, *avant-garde* poetry is essentially an attitude towards the entire universe, and has, as its subject-matter, human predicament and fate in this world. Therefore, the *Shi^{c}r* Movement seeks to re-construct and re-shape the world. As a consequence, the function of poetry is redefined as an endeavour, in the words of René Char, "to discover a world that is always in need of discovery."[1]

The difference between such earlier movements as the Mahjarites in North America, the Diwan and Apollo groups in Egypt, and the "Free" Verse Movement primarily in Iraq, on the one hand, and classical poetry on the other, is one of degree. The Shi^{c}r Movement marks a radical departure from the Arabic tradition of poetry.

Both Adonis and 'Unsī al-Ḥājj have been directly influenced, in their thoughts and formulations on the poème en prose, by Suzanne Bernard's historically and critically valuable study, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, 1959). It is relevant, nevertheless, to explore also the general evolution of literary prose and poetry in Arabic literature, and to give the historical context of modernist developments in the twentieth-century Arabic culture. The emergence of the new genre in Arabic literature crystallizes the anti-Classical tendencies and revives the ancient controversy over form and content, on the one hand, and over prose and poetry on the other, in a way readily suggestive of Imagism and the prose-poetry debate in Anglo-American literature of the first two decades of this century.

In spite of Adonis' substantial contribution to the genre at both levels of theory and praxis, al-Ḥājj is to be credited with bringing the tradition of the poème en prose to public notice. We are focusing on his first volume, Lan (Beirut, 1960) for two reasons: (a) it set the stage of Arabic poetry for a new birth as well as for a new orientation and (b) it marks at once the climax of al-Ḥājj's poetic and emotional rebellion, and of his quest for a new form or formlessness.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Adonis uses " الكشف عن عالم يظل فى حاجة إلى الكشف " ("Exploring a World that Remains in Need of Exploration") as a title of one of the chapters of his book, Zaman al-Shi^{c}r (Beirut: Dār al-^{c}Awda, 1972), pp. 8-27. Adonis attributes this catchphrase to René Char.

I

ARABIC PROSE:
THE GENERAL STATE OF THE ART

A.

Prose and Poetry in the Arabic Literary Tradition

The most striking of all formal distinctions in literature is the distinction between verse and prose, and it is all but a basic premise in national literatures. Arabic literature is no exception in this respect. The existence of two useful designations: 'naẓm' for verse, and 'shi^{c}r' for poetry, has not spared Arabic poetics the typical confusion between verse and poetry. The Arabic key word shi^{c}r is usually forgotten or overlooked in any contrast between verse and prose. The Arabic concept of naẓm (verse) suggests 'ordering' as juxtaposed with nathr (prose) which means 'scattering.' Cicero, we may recall, defines prose along similar lines as oratio soluta, i.e. free speech.

The sharp distinction between prose and poetry invites the comparison with Molière's Jourdain who learns with surprise that he has been talking prose all his life without knowing. Molière's seventeenth century definition of the two genres, which rests on their mutual exclusiveness, parallels the traditional distinction between the two genres in Arabic:

> Tout ce qui n'est point prose est vers;
> et tout ce qui n'est point vers est prose.[1]

(With the emergence of the poème en prose, M. Jourdain would be undoubtedly far more astonished today to learn that he can speak prose and poetry at one and the same time!)

Qudāma's dictum:

[2] "الشّعر قول موزون مقفًّى، يدلّ على معنى."

("Poetry is a rhythmic rhymed utterance that carries a meaning") became a rigid unassailable law governing the definition of poetry, and prose by extension.

Arab theoreticians, like the Hellenic-oriented Qudāma, were primarily more concerned with the manner than with the matter of literary genres, with form in most cases at the expense of content. As is usually typical of the academic phase of theorization, Arab critics and theorists were unduly preoccupied with formalism: they set the borderline between verse and prose, but did not dwell long enough on the distinction between verse and poetry. In other words, the formal divergences between verse and prose tended inevitably to blur, in the course of codification, the aesthetic and thematic convergences between poetry and prose. As a consequence, the very few insights into the common grounds between the two genres seem to have either gone begging in the archives of Arabic literature, or deliberately ignored in favour of the technical artifices of writing.

English literary criticism is replete with similar observations from, say, Sir Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetry in 1595 to Eliot's "The Borderline of Prose," in 1917 and C. Day Lewis' The Poetic Image in 1947.[3] The argument made in these works is to the effect that the borderline between prose and poetry is more apparent than real, and that the quality of poetry exists in both genres in varying proportions.

Although there is no room at this point to elucidate the aspects of the prose-verse debate with supporting material, a short passage from Wordsworth's reflection on the question is of practical bearing.

> Much confusion has been introduced into criticism by the contradistinction of poetry and prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of

> Fact or Science. The only antithesis to Prose is Metre; nor is this, in truth, a strict antithesis because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose, that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable.[4]

Arabic literary theory has always accorded poetry the highest and most esteemed rank among other literary genres. Pre-Islamic prose, accordingly, receded into the background, and was generally viewed as an inferior literary form in comparison with poetry.[5] What is more, prose writers interspersed their compositions with verse quotations varying in length, to cover up the apparent flaws in expression and win favour with readers.[6]

Although the authenticity of pre-Islamic prose is debatable, some specimens would help to illustrate the structural characteristics of the genre. The following piece, attributed to Qass b. Sā^{c}ida, is an often quoted example:

[7]

أيها الناس ، اسمعوا وعوا . من عاش مات .
ومن مات فات ، وكل ما هو آت آت . ليل داج ،
ونهار ساج ، وسماء ذات أبراج .

> (O people! Listen to me and comprehend well. He who lives dies, and he who dies is forgotten, and whatever is coming is bound to come. Jet-black night, and a serene daytime, and a multi-layered sky.)

The piece is typical of pre-Islamic gnomic prose. Thematically, it deals with a life-and-death platitude. Structurally, the sentences are kept strikingly brief and well-balanced. The parallelism and the varying rhyme-scheme are probably calculated to confer on the passage an incantatory character.

A more representative work of pre-Islamic literature and certainly more reliable is the Qur'ān. Rooted in the very heart of Arabic literary tradition, the Qur'ān did not only introduce a revolutionary ideology at the time, but it actually challenged the Arabs with a literary text of inimitable nature, which was received with both wonder and adulation. Assuming that the question of inimitability (*i^{c}jāz*) still exists, (and it indeed does with present-day Islamdom), the Qur'ān furnishes the Arab mind and sensibility with an incomparable model of structural and literary excellence. All literary and stylistic components such as diction, modes of expression, parallelisms, and internal rhythm, etc. conjoin in the concretization of the qur'anic content, making full use of the semantic, rhetorical and grammatical properties of the Arabic language. The qur'anic structure hinges on the masterly use of simile, metaphor, metonymy as well as allusion in a manner never before attained or surpassed.

Unlike the *maqāmas* (a pseudo-fictional genre characterized by the excessive use of rhyme and rhetorical devices), the Qur'ān has its species of rhyme ('*saj^c*'), even though it does not occur in the Qur'ān with any consistency. The Qur'ān uses nearly equally rhymed or unrhymed divisions at will. The qur'anic verse pattern usually admits of a full stop, thus allowing the reader or reciter to catch his breath--a pattern that is at once different from both verse and *saj^c*.

The qur'anic prose is, additionally, marked by what one would call, for want of a better term, 'rhetorical wonder' that no doubt underlies the Qur'an's metaphysical and spiritual leaps. Although it is quite unorthodox to interpret the 'excellence' of the Qur'ān in stylistic and syntactic terms, the fact remains that an elaborate body of linguistic details, affective devices and figures of speech such as the use of the parable, parallelism, rhythm, rhyme, repetition, emphasis, ellipsis, etc.

accounts for its unique character.

The advent of the Qur'ān was a singular event not only in the history of the Arabs, but also in the history of ideas and literary theory. In a class by itself, the qur'anic fact prompted literary historians to review their literary classifications. Accordingly, there are three genres in Arabic literature: prose, verse and Qur'ān.[8] Whatever its distinction, the Qur'ān evidences variously characteristics of both prose and poetry, and closely resembles the latter in technique and lyricism.

As Arabic prose and other modes of expression have been appreciably influenced by the Qur'ān, we shall witness, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the steady continuation of this influence: the potential stylistic and rhythmic features of the Qur'ān are bound to tempt such writers of poetic prose as Amīn al-Rīḥānī and Ḥusayn ᶜAfīf to imitate the qur'anic style very closely.

Centuries before the emergence of the poème en prose, Arabic literature had experienced many interesting attempts to bridge the gap between prose and poetry. Although these attempts did not represent the official mainstream in literature (and this may well explain why they remained scattered or buried in the encyclopaedias of Arabic literature), they underscored, and still do, the fact that the two genres overlap in spite of the sharp distinction.

The Andalusian poet, Ibn Khafāja (1051-1133) and the famous Fatimid writer, al-Qāḍi al-Fāḍil (1135-1200) used to mix prose and verse in their poems.[9] The two-hemistich line of verse in some of al-Fāḍil's poems consists of prose in the first half and verse in the second. This pattern is maintained in the entire twenty-four lines of the poem, e.g.

10 وصل كتابُ مولايَ بعدما   أصاتَ المنادي للصلاة فأُعتما
فلما استقرَّ لديَّ   تجلّى الذي سد جانب البدر أظلما
فقرأتُهُ   بعينٍ إذا استمطرتُها أمطرت دما

... ...

(My master's letter arrived after the muezzin had
intoned his call for the evening prayers;
Then, when it settled in my possession the erstwhile
dark aspect of the full moon lit up;
I, then, read it with an eye bathed in blood.)

Another equally interesting example of this literary mélange can be found in the epistolary writings of Badī^c al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (958-998). In the following poem, al-Hamadhānī weaves prose and verse into one fabric:

11 إنّا لقرب الأستاذ أطال الله بقاءه
كما طرب النشوان مالت به الخمرُ
ومن الارتياح للقائه   كما انتفض العصفورُ بلّله القطرُ
ومن الامتزاج بولائه   كما التقت الصهباء والبارد العذبُ
ومن الابتهاج بمرآه   كما اهتز تحت البارح الغصنُ الرطبُ

(Because of the nearness of the master--
may God grant him long life--
we are like someone enraptured;
Because of our happiness with meeting him,
we are like a sparrow refreshed by raindrops;
Because of our intimate relation with him,
we are like red wine and fresh water mixed
together, and
Because of our delight with seeing him,
we are like the tender twig quivering

under the weight of a departing bird.)

Aesthetically speaking, there is little merit in these compositions, much less poetry. They have, however, an historical value as they demonstrate the potential merger of the two genres.

Owing to the sharp distinction between prose and verse, poetry has specialized in certain areas of interest that have been conventionally beyond the scope of prose. But as Arabic prose did not follow a vertical line of development, it began to encroach gradually on the thematic territories of poetry. By the end of the second Hijrite century and throughout the third (ca. A.D. 800-900), Arabic prose developed into an art flexible enough to approach familiar 'poetic' themes, excel in them, and even supplant poetry in its appeal to Arab audiences. Prosaists began, accordingly, to write competently in the areas of hijā' ('satire'), madīḥ ('panegyric'), and rithā' ('elegy'), all of which were exclusively poetic themes. What is more, prose was successful in rendering these themes simpler and more accessible.

Even 'love'--a theme that was almost synonymous with the predominantly lyric poetry, became the core of prose 'romance' in the Omayyad times and the beginnings of the Abbāsid period. Thus, in the fourth H. century, the ghazal ('the amatory theme') surfaced as one of the prevalent themes in prose. Consequently, amatory prose writings compared favourably with the best known amatory poems.[12] Eminent writers, like Ibn al-ᶜAmīd (d. 960) underscored the credibility of prose in this practice. The following excerpt from a love letter by him will serve as an illustration:

كيف أسلو عنه ، وأنا أراه ؟
وأنساه ، وهو لي تجاه ؟
هو أغلب عليّ ،
وأقربُ إليّ
من أن يُرخي لي عناني
أو يخليني واختياري. ... *

(How could I cease to think of her
while I see her?
Or forget her while she is in front of me?
She prevails on me;
She is too close to me to loosen my reins
or leave me to my own choice. ...)

A comparatively new form of prose writing, yet closely related to poetry on thematic grounds, emerged and acquired currency due to the efforts of al-Tha^{c}ālibī, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, and Badī^c al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, namely, al-rasā'il al-ikhwāniyya ('fraternal epistolary literature'). Essentially prompted by individual emotions, this form of writing ranges the whole gamut from love, desire and awe to hate, satire and scorn; from light reproach, apology and entreatment to eulogy, condolence and lamentation. Conventionally regarded as the subject-matter proper to poetry, these themes become increasingly raw material for prose writing.

In the fourth century of the Hijra, Arabic prose became a more viable literary genre, not only capable of rendering its own, but also

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* The use of the third person masculine singular instead of the feminine, has proven practically more convenient on linguistic and conventional grounds. In my translation, I have used the feminine pronoun instead. The lineal arrangement is mine and is meant to focus attention on rhyme, balance, and parallelisms.

the majority of poetic themes. The development of the new genre of the *maqāmas* ('assemblies or *scéances*) merits a special attention as it has practical bearing on the steady narrowing of the formal and thematic gap between the two main genres in Arabic: prose and verse. The *maqāmas* are written in rhymed prose, and tend to make full use of the potentialities of prose and poetry alike. By definition, the *maqāma* is a short narrative or anecdote, the style of which is euphuistic, assonantal and characteristically marked by recondite diction and verbal pyrotechnics. The writer of the *maqāma* strives after elegance of expression at the expense of conciseness and even sense. Essentially a *mélange* of prose and verse, the *maqāmas* provide further proof of the 'blood relation', as it were, between the two genres--a fact the general drift of classical aesthetics tends to overlook. From the viewpoint of structure, the *maqāmas* are characterized by parallelism where the second part of a sentence balances with the first, either by way of synthesis or antithesis, thus producing a rhyme of the sense as well as of the sound.[14] The baroque style of the *maqāmas* antedates, and bears striking, if perhaps accidental, resemblance to such trends in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century western European prose writing as Marinism in Italy, Euphuism in England and both Gongorism and Conceptism in Spain.

Much can be said about the *maqāma* genre from a variety of angles, especially about its relation to and relative influence on the genesis and development of fiction in Arabic literature. In view of our study, the *maqāma* genre holds for us a special significance in that the genre was in many ways an expression of the subtle interest of either reconciling prose and verse, or developing from them a hybrid art. Some of the baroque and stylistic traits of the maqāma stripped of almost all fictional layers surface in Ḥusayn ᶜAfīf's 'prosified poetry' ('shiᶜr manthūr').

ᶜAfīf's shiᶜr manthūr is to be found in four volumes consistently written in this literary form.[15] Despite the special qualities of this poet, his contribution cannot be seen as congruous with the direction of the overall new development in writing; rather, it is a manifestation of 'poetic' retrogression, as it were. His stilted diction, style and syntax; his preciosity in imagery and allusions--all revolve well within the orbit of classical rhetorics and poetic conventions. Ḥadīqat al-Ward ("The Rose Garden") comprises 178 short untitled pieces, each bearing a serial number. They vary widely in length as some consist only of one paragraph of three or four lines whereas others consist of two pages.

The author oscillates between erotic and platonic love-poetry with shades from Khayyām and the carpe diem theme. As an illustration, the following piece is quoted in full.

[16]
أدرِكِ الأشياء قبل فواتها.
خذِ القبل شررًا يتقد، فغدًا تصبح ثلجًا في فمك.
اقطف زهورك في البكور قبل أن تلفحها الشمس.
والندى يأتلق في البكور للحظة، فعجّل بتأمله.
لا عهد الحياة في جريها تغتنمها؛
والعمر يمر من حولك فانتهزه.

(Catch things before they pass away.
Take the inflamed kisses, as they will
become tomorrow ice in your mouth.
Cull your flowers in the early morning
before the sun seers them.

> Hasten to contemplate the dew
> that glitters only for a moment.
> Pursue the running course of life
> in order to avail yourself of it.
> Seize upon your life time;
> Your age is fleeting.)

In the majority of his 'poetic prose', the author either apostrophizes, or sings of, his beloved woman in a characteristically subjective fashion. His themes centre on nostalgia, the paraphernalia of erotic and platonic love, the pleasures of life, transience and death. Most pronounced among his motifs are _Dum vivamus, vivamus_, _carpe diem_ and _Ubi sunt qui ante nos fueront_, both of which are quite familiar in the Arabic literary tradition. Some pieces are straightforward verse, but presented typographically as mere prose.[17]

While theoretically poets seek some elbow room for their personal experience in prose forms, ᶜAfīf's poetic prose is shackled by classical Arabic prose and poetry conventions. Like classical poetry, ᶜAfīf's poetic prose takes the line as its structural unit, that is to say, his prose-line runs parallel to the conventional verse-line, and is as such thematically self-sufficient. It is also worth noting that when he does not use metre and rhyme, he goes to great length to offset their absence by using fairly regular _sajᶜ_ together with such other devices as _badīᶜ_ ("tropes"), repetition, antithesis and different types of parallelism. ᶜAfīf's vocabulary is very limited, far less suggestive. It imitates slavishly the diction of the Qur'ān as well as that of the pre-Islamic and Islamic amatory poetry. In view of his meticulous choice of words and considerable polish, ᶜAfīf's poetic prose often verges on affectation and pedantry.

The author winds up his volume _Ḥadīqat al-Ward_ with a piece that holds more than passing interest for us as it attempts a delineation of his own poetic style:

18

حديقة الورد
شعر منثور. يجري وفق قوالب عفوية يصبها ويستنفدها أولاً بأول.
لا يتوخى موسيقى الوزن، ولكنه يستمد نغمه من ذات نفسه.
لا يشرح، ومع ذلك يوحي عبر إيجازه بمعانٍ لم يقلها.
ليس كشعر القصيد، ولا كنثر المقال، ولكنه أسلوب ثالث.
ومعاناته أنه يأبى إلّا أن ينضبط دون الاستعانة بضوابط.

(The Rose Garden
Prose poetry: flows according to spontaneous patterns
which it pours forth and consumes gradually.
It seeks no metrical music, but it derives
its tune from within itself.
It explains not; nevertheless, through its brevity,
it suggests meanings it has not uttered.
It is neither like the poetry of the poem,
nor like the prose of the essay;
it is a third style.
To experience [this style] is to insist on being
regulated through no regulatory laws.)

The key phrase in this piece is probably "third style." It has been noted that ^{c}Afīf has hardly freed himself from the fetters of poetry and prose: at times he versifies but presents his material on the page like prose, and at times, he burdens his prose with *saj^c*, tropes and the trappings of classical Arabic poetry short of rhyme and metre proper, even though *saj^c* in prose is the counterpart of rhyme in verse. In this light, ^{c}Afīf's claims to spontaneity, natural music, suggestiveness and freedom from laws--should be taken *cum grano salis*.

B.

Definitions and Distinctions

This study takes issue with the commonly held view that the poème en prose can be traced back to forms of the nathr fannī (art prose) in Arabic literature such as saj^c and nathr shi^{c}rī (poetic prose). Whereas we recognize, however, that the early existence of these forms in Arabic literature and experimentation with poetic prose in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries have helped, among other factors, to create a relatively favourable climate for the emergence of the poème en prose in the 1950s, we hasten to contend that the poème en prose qua literary genre is imported from French literature.

To examine the fortune of this form, its introduction and adaptation in modern Arabic poetry, especially through the combined efforts of Adonis and al-Ḥājj, it is necessary (a) to sort out the chaotic terminology connected with prose in Arabic, (b) to survey and assess the important experimentations with poetic prose, and (c) to evaluate Adonis' and al-Ḥājj's theoretical approaches to the genre.

From the beginning of its recorded history, Arabic literature has known two modes of literary expression in prose, both of which exist in the Qur'ān. The first kind is saj^c (rhymed prose) which is a form of literary expression similar in its function to what is known in the Western literary tradition as homoeoteleuton. To this kind belong the Mekkī sūras (chapters) of the Qur'ān, perhaps the most eloquent illustration of which is the sūra of al-Raḥmān:

[19] الرحمن، علّم القرآن، خلق الإنسان، علمه البيان،
الشمس والقمر بحسبان، والنجم والشجر يسجدان، والسماء رفعها
ووضع الميزان، ألّا تطغَوْا في الميزان، وأقيموا الوزن بالقسط ولا تخسروا
الميزان، والأرض وضعها للأنام، فيها فاكهة والنخل ذات الأكمام،
والحبّ ذو العصف والريحان، فبأي آلاء ربكما تكذبان.

(The All-merciful has taught the Koran
He created man
and He has taught him the Explanation.

The sun and the moon to a reckoning,
and the stars and the trees bow themselves;
and heaven--He raised it up, and set the
Balance.
[Transgress not in the Balance,
and weigh with justice, and skimp not in the Balance.]
And earth--He set it down for all beings,
therein fruits, and palm-trees with sheaths,
and grain in the blade, and fragrant herbs.
O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?)

The shorter suras of the Qur'ān show a high degree of rhythmic concentration and a successful blending of poetry and prose. The sura of al-Ikhlāṣ provides a good example.

[20] قل هو الله أحد، الله الصمد، لم يلد
ولم يولد، ولم يكن له كفوا أحد.

(Say: 'He is God, One
God, the Everlasting Refuge
who has not begotten, and has not been begotten
and equal to Him is not anyone.')

This style did not originate in the Qur'ān; its tradition existed in pre-Islamic literature under the rubric of sajᶜ al-Kuhhān (the rhymed prose of the pre-Islamic clergy), an illustration of which has been cited elsewhere in this chapter.[21]

It should be acknowledged, however, that the Qur'ān helped a good deal to develop this mode of literary expression and bring it to its technical peak as can be readily demonstrated in the *sūra* of *al-Raḥmān*. The Qur'ān, further, shifted this kind of rhymed prose away from mere incantation to areas of narrative art and metaphysical reflection. The following excerpt from the *sūra* of *Maryam* serves as a unique example of how *saj*^{c} is used advantageously in narrative prose.

[22] واذكر في الكتاب مريم إذ انتبذت من أهلها مكانا شرقيًّا ،
فاتخذت من دونهم حجابًا فأرسلنا إليها روحنا فتمثل لها بشرًا سويًّا ،
قالت إني أعوذ بالرحمن منك إن كنت تقيًّا ، قال إنما أنا رسول
ربك لأهب لك غلامًا زكيًّا ، قالت أنّى يكون لي غلام
ولم يمسسني بشر ، ولم أكُ بغيًّا .

> (And mention in the Book Mary when she withdrew from her people to an eastern place, and she took a veil apart from them; then We sent unto her Our Spirit that presented himself to her a man without fault. She said, 'I take refuge in the All-merciful from thee! If thou fearest God. ...' He said, 'I am but a messenger come from thy Lord, to give thee a boy most pure.' She said, 'How shall I have a son whom no mortal has touched, neither have I been unchaste.)

The Qur'ān uses *saj*^{c} extensively in *sūras* of preaching and propagation, where it presents God and His attributes as well as issues of reward, punishment and good behaviour and the like. In a word, the *saj*^{c} appears in all that falls under the heading of oratory.

The tradition of *saj*^{c} in Arabic prose continued through the heyday of Classicism, but after the passage of the age of great inspiration, it lapsed into a decorative craft which attained to its perfection in the maqāma genre. With the increasing popularity of folk narratives in the Middle Ages, saj^c remained a literary device in related folk literature as is evident in folk epics, biographies, and in the readily accessible example, Alf Layla wa Layla (The One Thousand and One Nights).

This rhymed prose--we shall call literary prose or verse-prose--resembles at best poetic prose, but when inspiration is lacking, it takes on only the artificial aspects of poetry such as rhyme, sonority and the extreme use of metaphors.

The other kinds of literary expression, which Arabic has known since the beginning of Islam, as for instance the direct declarative style, are either relatively or entirely devoid of rhetorical and/or metaphorical ornamentation. Speciments of this kind are again to be found in the Qur'ān, especially in 'āyas (verses) dealing with legislation. Such sūras as al-Baqara, al-Nisā' and al-Mā'ida, for instance, offer good examples of this kind of prose. The following 'āya is quoted as an illustration.

[23] يا أيها الذين آمنوا إذا قمتم للصلاة فاغسلوا وجوهكم
وأيديكم إلى المرافق وامسحوا برؤوسكم وأرجلكم إلى الكعبين.
وإن كنتم جنبا فاطهروا. وإن كنتم مرضى أو على سفر
أو جاء أحد منكم من الغائط أو لمستم النساء فلم تجدوا
ماء فتيمموا صعيدا طيبا، فامسحوا بوجوهكم وأيديكم منه.
ما يريد الله ليجعل عليكم من حرج ولكن يريد ليطهركم وليتم
نعمته عليكم لعلكم تشكرون.

> (O believers, when you stand up to pray
> Wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows,
> and wipe your heads, and your feet up to the
> ankles. If you are defiled, purify yourselves;
> but if you are sick or on a journey, or if
> any of you comes from the privy, or you have
> touched women, and you can find no water,
> then have recourse to wholesome dust and
> wipe your faces and your hands with it.
> God does not desire to make any impediment
> for you; but he desires to purify you, and that
> He may complete His blessing upon you; haply
> you will be thankful.)

This direct declarative style is free of rhyme and rhythm, and free of the imagination automatically associated with metaphor; it is free of such characteristics because it deals primarily with a referential content, namely, the rite of ablution in Islam. In this sense, it is more like legal writings whose criterion of eloquence is not beauty or appeal to emotion, but coherence, precision and clarity of expression. In juxtaposition with literary prose, this kind will be called technical prose, thus avoiding the misleading term artistic prose which is used erroneously and with imprecision for both kinds.

The Qur'ān provided the model for technical prose writings in Arabic literary criticism, philosophy, history, geography and in the disciplines of rhetorics, prosody and grammar. It is worth noting that, at the height of Arabic civilization, technical prose overshadowed literary prose and pushed it gradually into the background.

Similarly, when Arabic civilization collapsed in the Middle Ages, and gave ground to the emerging Islamic civilization, marked by ethno-cultural diversities, especially in the provinces--the transition was accompanied with a renewal of the conflict between technical and literary prose styles. The growth of nationalities led to the use of literary prose, i.e. rhymed prose, as a vehicle for ethno-cultural annals, epics and maqāmas.

So dominant was literary prose at this juncture that it made frequent incursions into the territory of technical prose. Among the consequences was that official correspondence and bureaucratic Arabic acquired several artifices of literary prose such as rhyme, rhetorics and metonymy.

Such was the state of Arabic prose through the closing decades of the eighteenth century, when the Arab world was brought into direct contact with European civilization. Suffice it here to allude to the fact that this contact resulted in the separation of the two kinds of prose: the one, the technical, by specializing in the treatment of thoughts and scientific facts; the other in literary creation.

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, technical prose made considerable advances, and became practically the medium of expression, thus reducing literary prose to a marginal function. Literary prose in its traditional form is now all but extinct except probably for a form of writing, namely, poetic prose used by Rīḥānī and Gibrān in the opening decades of this century. Gibrān and his disciples attempted, through this latter form, to renew the prophetic voice of the holy books where poetry and prose tend to intermingle. This species of literary expression has since flourished in the Lebanon. As for Egypt, poetic prose (shi^{c}r manthūr) acquired a measure of popularity before and during the heyday of Egyptian Romanticism (practically from the beginning of this century until 1930s). Writers al-Manfalūṭī (1876-1924), Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi^{c}ī (1880-1937), and Mayy Ziyāda (1886-1941) wrote entire volumes in poetic-prose.[24] More recently, Ḥusayn ^{c}Afīf, discussed above, and Tharwat ᶜUkāsha, in his translations of Gibrān in the 1960s, have tried with little success to revive this mode of expression.

By way of summing up, the two columns of the table below include the commonest and the least precisely used terms in the poetry-prose controversy. The column on the left-hand side belongs to the overriding concerns of this research.

قصيدة	نثر شعري
شعر حر	شعر منثور
شعر مُرْسَل	
شعر تفعيلة	
شعر مطلق؛ منطلق؛ محرّر	قصيدة النثر

Three special terms are singled out for re-definition on two grounds: (a) because they are often confused in modern Arabic literary criticism, and (b) because they are closely related to the poème en prose.

I. Nathr Shiᶜri (poetic prose):

This term refers to the poetic raw material,[25] by definition, amorphous; both indigenous in Arabic and semi-imported, given currency through translations from non-Arabic, chiefly western, poetry. Usually, but not always, it has on the page the appearance of prose. In the Arabic phrase (نثر شعري), the emphasis is laid on the first word نثر (prose).

II. *Shi^{c}r Manthūr* (prose/prosified poetry):

This form partakes of the many characteristics of poetry save metre and rhyme. Usually, but not always, it is presented typographically like verse, that is, the text is lineated on the page.

While inevitably overlapping with poetic prose, this *shi^{c}r manthūr* has no officially recognized ancestry in Arabic. Its appearance in Arabic has been occasioned by the necessity of translation from foreign poetry. Verse lineation helps to retain if only a formal semblance of the original, and to distinguish it from ordinary prose.

III. *Shi^{c}r Ḥurr* (free verse):

From the historical perspective, the term is borrowed from the Western literary tradition, being the counterpart of either the English designation, "free verse" or the French, "*vers libre*." This species of writing refers to poetry devoid of rhyme and rhythm as a rule, although metre and/or rhyme may occasionally occur.[26] The borderline between *shi^{c}r manthūr* (prose poetry) and *shi^{c}r ḥurr* (free verse) is fluid enough to allow some interchangeability.

FOOTNOTES

[1] *Le Bougeois gentilhomme* (Paris, 1933), II:iv

[2] Iḥsān ^{c}Abbās, *Tārīkh al-Naqd al-Adabī ^{c}ind al-^{c}Arab: Naqd al-Shi^{c}r min al-Qarn al-Thānī ḥatta al-Qarn al-Thāmin al-Hijrī* (Beirut: Dar al-Amāna, 1971), p. 191.

[3] C. Day Lewis, *The Poetic Image* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), p. 37. T.S. Eliot, "The Borderline of Prose," *New Statesman* (May 19, 1917), pp. 157-159. See also T.S. Eliot, Frederic Manning and Richard Aldington, *Poetry in Prose: Three Essays* (London: The Chapbook, 1921).

[4] The Preface to the second edition of *The Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963; 1968), p. 314. The stress on the word 'strict' is Wordsworth's.

[5] Zākī Mubārak, *al-Nathr al-Fannī fi'l-Qarn al-Rābi^{c}* (Beirut: 1975), p. 37

[6] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Min Ḥadīth al-Shi^{c}r wa l-Nathr* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma^{c}ārif, 1948), quoted in Zākī Mubārak, *al-Nathr*, p. 43.

[9] Adonis (^{c}Alī Aḥmad Sa^{c}īd), *Dīwān al-Shi^{c}r al-^{c}Arabī*, vol. III (Beirut, 1968), p. 68.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 146.

[11] Mubārak, *al-Nathr*, p. 129.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 192.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] Ibid., pp. 241-242. See also Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-Fann wa Madhāhibuh fi'l-Nathr al-^{c}Arabī*. 7th edn. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma^{c}ārif, 1974), p. 238, and Badī^c al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt Badī^c al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī*. Trans. W.J. Prendergast (London: Curzon Press, 1915; rpt 1973). See particularly the translator's useful introduction, pp. 1-25.

[15] ^{c}Afīf's volumes in chronological order are *al-Ghadīr* ["The Brook"] (Cairo, 1961), *al-'Urghun* ["The Organ"] (Cairo, 1961), *al-Ghasaq* ["The Twilight"] (Cairo, 1968) and *Ḥadīqat al-Ward* ["The Rose Garden"] (Cairo, 1974).

[16] *Ḥadīqat al-Ward* (Cairo, 1974), p. 32.

[17] See pieces nos. 49 and 104, *al-'Urghun* (Cairo, 1961), pp. 54 and 104. With one minor exception, the first poem is throughout in the *Kāmil* or shortened *rajaz* metres. A *ramal* scansion of this piece is also possible. The second piece in its entirety is in the *mutaqārib* metre.

[18] *Ḥadīqat al-Ward* (Cairo, 1974), p. 197.

[19] The Qur'ān, LX: 1-13. Instead of attempting a personal translation of the relevant quotations from the Qur'ān, I have used Arthur J. Arberry's interpretation, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford University Press, 1964). Arberry's capitalization, punctuation and spelling are retained unaltered.

[20] The Qur'ān, CXII: 1-4

[21] See above, p. 6.

[22] The Qur'ān, XIX: 16-20

[23] *Ibid.*, V:6

[24] A sampling of their *shi^{c}r manthūr* can be found in the following works: Ziyāda, *Ẓulumāt wa Ashi^{cc}a* (Cairo, n.d.); al-Rāfi^{c}ī, *Rasā'il al-Aḥzān* (Cairo, 1924), *al-Saḥāb al-Aḥmar* (Cairo, n.d.) and *Awrāq al-Ward* (Cairo, n.d.); al-Manfalūṭī, *al-Naẓarāt*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1925-1926).

[25] It is suggested that some of Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose* were the initial form of some of his poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*. It is also suggested that he used to write a 'prose poetic' version first of some of his poems; his "L'Invitation au voyage" in both forms is a good example. See about this point P. Mansell Jones, *Background to Modern French Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1951; rpt. 1968), p. 121.

[26] Three types of "free verse" are identified in English: The Mathew Arnold type, the Whitman type and the modern type of free verse. See on this point Lawrence J. Zilman, *The Art and Craft of Poetry* (New York, 1967; rpt. 1972), pp. 84-88.

II

THE *DĪWĀN* AND RELATED MOVEMENTS IN MODERN ARABIC POETRY

A.

The *Dīwān* Movement and English Romantic Aesthetics

The *Dīwān* movement, flourishing in Egypt between the two World Wars, in the 1920s and a good part of 1930s represents a crucial transitional phase in the history of modern Arabic poetry. Although the *Dīwān*, a two-volume document of literary criticism to which the movement owes its name, was published in 1921, the poetry and literary criticism of the three protagonists: Shukrī, al-Māzinī and al-^{c}Aqqād date as far back as 1909 when Shukrī made his literary *début* by publishing his first collection of poems: *Daw’ al-Fajr* ("The Light of Dawn"). Between 1909 and 1919, Shukrī published six more volumes of poetry, some prefaced with critical statements arguing for an authentic poetry compatible with the sensibility of the twentieth century. Similarly, al-^{c}Aqqād and al-Māzinī made substantial contributions both at the levels of theory and practice[1] before the appearance of the *Dīwān* in 1921. The publication of this important work may be seen here as a summing-up and further articulation of the joint aesthetics the protagonists of the movement advanced, in spite of their individual conflicts.

The *Dīwān* movement constitutes the first and probably most iconoclastic attack against the literary establishment of the time. ^{c}Aqqād dealt mainly with the defects of Neo-classical poetry as embodied in Shawqī (1882-1932), while Māzinī addressed himself to the then popular prose style of al-Manfalūtī (1876-1924).[2] As such the *Dīwān* movement figures as the precursor of the subsequent movements that have been since calling in question the classical conventions of poetry, and underscoring the urgency for a new poetics.

Scholarship[3] on the subject shows some tendency to rely uncritically on ᶜAqqād's pronouncements on romantic influence and thus sketches out a partial image of the movement. It is necessary therefore to place the question of foreign influence on the Group in its proper perspective. The indebtedness of this movement to the Western literary tradition is a foregone conclusion, but ᶜAqqād's personal account of his generation's knowledge of English literature and world literature as a whole should be carefully examined and qualified.

Of his own generation, and especially of his partners in the Dīwān movement, ᶜAqqād makes this important statement which I shall have to quote in its entirety:

> As regards the spirit [of their poetry], the post-Shawqī younger generation was the product of a school that bore no resemblance to any previous schools in the history of modern Arabic literature. It is a school that was widely read in English literature and, unlike the younger writers . . . who appeared towards the turn of the past century, did not confine its reading [in western literature] to certain limited aspects of French writing. Their extensive reading in English literature notwithstanding, they did not overlook the works of the German, the Italian, the Russian, the Spanish and the ancient Greek and Latin poets and prose writers. They seem to have benefited more from English literary criticism than from poetry or other forms of literature.
>
> I do not think it would be wrong to say that to the whole school Hazlitt was the guide (imām) in literary criticism as it was he who led them to [a true understanding of] the meaning of poetry and the other arts, and the various kinds of writing and to the proper use of comparison and quotation . . . for their admiration for Hazlitt, then, the Egyptian authors were not slavish imitators; what enabled them to retain their independent judgment when approaching western literature was the fact that they had

> previously and even concurrently been reading their own literature; they therefore did not enter the world of western literature blindly or without discrimination.[4]

Obviously, ^{c}Aqqād's statement is unduly exaggerated and entails a few omissions. Muḥammad Mandūr, one of the leading Egyptian literary critics, was probably the first to take exception to ^{c}Aqqād's partisan views.[5]

First, it hardly seems credible that the *Dīwān* Group studied thoroughly pre-Islamic (*Jāhiliyya*) and Omayyad poets; their interest in classical Arab poets was confined only to the Abbāsid period as can be gathered from their writings on such poets as al-Mutanabbī, Bashshār b. Burd, Abu'l-^{c}Alā', Ibnu'l-Rūmī, al-Sharīf ar-Raḍī and (at a later date) Abū-Nuwās. In accordance with their literary ideology, the choice of these poets was primarily determined by two closely related criteria: (a) the poet's individual originality, and (b) his independence from *^{c}amūd al-Shi^{c}r*, i.e. the classical conventions of poetry.[6]

Secondly, the suggestion that the three protagonists had, in their youth, an extensive and intimate knowledge of the different periods of western literature is not tenable in view of the fact that they derived their knowledge of English and other national literatures through the medium of English.

Thirdly, ^{c}Aqqād's claim that the Group was widely read in English and American literature is not readily corroborated by textual evidence. Their actual poetic production reveals that they were mainly inspired by Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, an anthology of English lyrical poetry from Shakespeare to the mid-nineteenth century.[7] The *Golden Treasury* was one of the textbooks Shukrī and Māzinī had known as students at the Teachers' Training College in Cairo, and it had exerted on both of them as well as on ᶜAqqād a tremendous influence. The three members of the Group found in Palgrave's anthology an inexhaustible source of themes, images and modes of expression.

The borderline between admiration for, and translation from, English literature, on the one hand, and plagiarism, on the other, was not sharply marked. In the preface to his fifth collection of poems, al-Khaṭarāt ('The Reflections'), first published, in 1916, Shukrī is prompted to grapple with the chaos of ethical and literary values.'

[8]
مما زاد الطين بلة أن بعض الأدباء لا يرعى حرمة، ولا يردعه
ضميره عن السرقة القبيحة. وأمثال هذه الأفعال قد بثت
فى أذهان كثير من القراء أن كل شىء، جليل معناه، غريب موضوعه،
مسروق لا محالة. وروّج هذا الرأى طلاب فوضى الآداب الذين يمرحون
فى ظلامها مرح الخفافيش فى الظلام.

> What made things worse was that some unscrupulous men of letters had no compunctions about abominable plagiarism. Such actions as these have instilled into the minds of many readers that whatever is elevated in meaning and exotic in theme is inevitably stolen [from western literature] - a notion made current by the seekers of ethical chaos who revel, like bats, in its darkness.

In what was to cause a serious rift in the Group, Shukrī winds up his preface by accusing Māzinī of plagiarism.[9] He points out that some of Māzinī's poems such as " فتى فى سياق الموت " (A Youth in the Throes of Death), " قبر الشاعر " (The Poet's Tomb), " الذكرى " (The Memory), " الوردة الرسول " (The Messenger Rose), " الشاعر المحتضر " (The Dying Poet), and " شوكة الحسن " (The Thorn of Beauty) were literal translations[10] from Shelley, Hood, Heine, [James Russell] Lowell and [Charles Jeremiah] Wells.[11] He further asserts that Māzinī, the prose writer, is by no means immune to this charge on the grounds that his essay, "Tanāsukh al-^{c}Arwāḥ" ("Metempsychosis"), published in *al-Bayān* review is copied in its entirety from an essay by Addison in the *Spectator*, and that long passages in his writings on Ibn al-Rūmī are taken from Carlyle's literary essays and Hugo's book, *William Shakespeare*.[12]

This revelatory, if unfortunate, dispute between the two most closely related members of the *Dīwān* Group was carried over to the pages of the daily press,[13] and culminated in a two-part essay entitled "Ṣanam al-Alā^{c}īb" ("The Idol of Trickery") by Māzinī and published in 1921 in which he launched a vituperative attack on Shukrī's personality, adducing 'evidential material' from Shukrī's writings to prove his madness, or more specifically his psychoneurosis.[14]

Māzinī's criticism of Shukrī's poetic talent and/or poetry is of little or no consequence. Although Māzinī declares his plan "to track down Shukrī's plagiarism from Arab and western poets,"[15] he abandons the issue altogether. In view of Māzinī's argumentative nature and tenacity of purpose at this early stage of his career, rather than regarding this omission as a gesture of magnanimity, we are more inclined to assume that Māzinī was unable to detract from Shukrī's poetic talent and secure place in Arabic literature.

There is ample evidence[16] that Shukrī was quite acquainted with Addison, and impressed by his celebrated series of the *Spectator* papers on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" which were essentially based on John Locke's sensationalist psychology. Addison's main thesis is that "the pleasures of the imagination are the pleasurable sensations stimulated in ourselves directly by certain external causes, or indirectly by reasonably close imitations of, or substitutes for such causes.[17] Shukrī seems to have taken to heart these ideas, and put them to use in his descriptive poems. Writes Shukrī:

[18]
وقفت على البحر الخضم عشية   وللريح فيه والعباب بوادرُ
وقد بسط الليل البهيم جلاله   وللسحب نوءٌ هائل اللج هامرُ
وللرعد ضحك رائع الصوت هائل   كأنه ضجيج الرعد بالناس ساخرُ

I stood in the evening by the vast sea
    While the wind and waves were a-stirring;
The jet-black night spread out its grandeur
    and the clouds poured overwhelming torrential rain;
The thunder had a peal of laughter, dreadful in tone,
    frightening as though the rolling thunder mocks
        the people.

There is an abundance of such descriptive passages or entire poems in his Dīwān,[19] in which he communes with nature and responds sensitively to its enthralling manifestations: the sea and the waves; the winds and the storms; the dark nights and the vicissitudes of time, etc.

It is ironical that Shukrī's fascination for the Addisonian theories embroils him in the very indiscretion for which he censured Māzinī, namely, plagiarism. The short explanatory note with which he prefaces his poem, "Mar'a'l Jamāl wa Dhikra'l-Jalāl" ("Vision of Beauty and Memory of Grandeur") is credited to al-Nāẓim ("The Poet"), although it comes straight out of Addison.[20]

The assertion made earlier by ᶜAqqād that Hazlitt was the indisputable guide ("imām") of his generation[21] is not entirely true in the light of the other, equally important, influences that helped the Dīwān Group to formulate their aesthetic theory. It is not, however, difficult to rationalize ᶜAqqād's enthusiasm for the English critic. Unlike his associates: Shukrī and Māzinī, ᶜAqqād and Hazlitt evince a kindred temperament and cast of mind in that they are characteristically prone to self-contradiction, harsh, at times savage, criticism and political inconsistencies. Their critical approaches, too, follow similar lines: ᶜAqqād's rhetorical, vague and emotive literary criticism may well parallel Hazlitt's want of detailed methodical analysis or exposition.

The major idea underlying the Dīwān movement and its conceptualization of poetry can be traced back to the 18th and 19th century English literary tradition. In all likelihood, Shukrī will in the final analysis figure prominently as a cultural intermediary in the forefront of this movement, especially in the first three decades of this century. Notwithstanding the paucity of his literary criticism, we tend to believe that it was he who sowed the seeds of poetic innovation and blazed the trail for a young generation of poets including his partners: Māzinī and ᶜAqqād.

Between the years 1909 and 1919, Shukrī published seven volumes of poetry, some with prefaces, thus providing his Group with the practical model for the kind of new poetry they long argued for and wanted to create. The prefaces Shukrī wrote for the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh parts of his dīwān cover a wide range of subjects such as "Emotion in Poetry," "The Function of Poetry," "Poetry and its Orientations," "The Stimuli of Poetry," and "The Poets as Perfectionists" (Kamaliyyun) - all of which are set against the background of Arabic classical and neo-classical conventions of poetry.

It is my purpose here to examine some salient aspects of the early contact between English and Arabic literatures that was to fertilize the cultural and literary milieu in Egypt in the early decades of this century. In my treatment of this and related matters, I attempt to rely largely on Shukrī's literary criticism (comprised in the prefaces) both as an index to and a manifestation of the impact of English Romanticism on the Dīwān movement in its formative phases.

The fact that I take Shukrī, rather than ᶜAqqād or Māzinī, as my point of departure underlines my opinion that Shukrī's early contribution both in theory and practice helped to define the character and orientation of this important movement. By approaching Shukrī's central aesthetic views in their western matrix, I also hope to 'adjust' and/or complement the configuration of the movement which is traditionally and popularly seen from ᶜAqqād's perspective.

In the important preface to the fifth part of his dīwān (which for personal and thematic considerations, is strongly suggestive of Wordsworth's prefaces to the Lyrical Ballads), Shukrī deals with the diverse facets of contemporary poetry and expresses his frustration at the state of the art and the dominant literary criteria that have reduced poetry to an exercise in futility.[22] He complains bitterly of the lifeless, artificial nature of contemporary Arabic poetry and ridicules the stock-in-trade of erotic poetry; its hackneyed modes of expression, stereotyped imagery derived from the Arab desert, and insincere content. His observations, made in 1916, have timeless freshness to them, and are in the main couched in the language of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Hazlitt.

In the prefaces to the third and fourth sections of his diwan, Shukrī sets much store by the role imagination and passions play in poetry. He uses the word, ᶜāṭifa to denote a complexity of emotions: hatred, hope, despair, jealousy, remorse, bravery, cowardice . . .

23 والحب أعلق العواطف بالنفس، ومنه تنشأ عواطف كثيرة، مثل البغض، أو الود، أو الرجاء، أو اليأس، أو الحسد، أو الشجاعة، أو الجبن ...

His definition of poetry is: "the language of passions, imagination and good taste."

24 الشعر هو كلمات العواطف والخيال، والذوق السليم .

In Hazlitt's celebrated essay, "On Poetry in General," we find this definition:

> Poetry is the language of imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. . . . Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness are all poetry.[25]

The two definitions are too identical to leave any doubt that Shukrī is consciously making full use of Hazlitt's thoughts on poetry.

One of the most fundamental ideas Shukrī develops in the preface to his fifth collection of poems: al-Khaṭarāt (1916), and most probably for the first time in modern Arabic literary criticism, is the all-embracing, unifying nature of the imagination. As an elemental constituent of poetry and poetry craftsmanship, imagination is in no sense confined to the similes and metaphors in the poem, rather it embraces its whole spirit, its thoughts and its subject matter.

[26] الخيال ليس مقصوراً على التشبيه، فإنه يشمل روح القصيدة، وموضوعها وغرضها.

Imagination, as such, enables the poet to conceive things in terms of an integrated whole and invests him with the power of "reducing the multitude to unity of effects," to use Coleridge's phrase.[27] In the preface to the fourth section of his dīwān, Shukrī paraphrases Coleridge as follows:

[28] إن وظيفة الشاعر فى الإبانة عن الصلات التى تربط أعضاء الوجود ومظاهره. والشعر يرجع إلى طبيعة التأليف بين الحقائق.

> (The poet's function resides in the elucidation of the links that bind together the constituent parts of existence and its phenomena, and poetry is derived from the nature of unifying realities.)

With respect to Shelley's indebtedness to the Biographia Literaria, George Watson holds that this work has been "a proper object for respect and for plunder."[29] This is no less true in Shukrī's case as he appropriates Coleridge's distinction between 'Imagination' and 'fancy', which he calls 'takhayyul' and 'tawahhum':

[30] ينبغى أن نميز فى معانى الشعر وصوره بين نوعين، نسمى أحدهما التخيل، والآخر التوهم. فالتخيل هو أن يظهر الشاعر الصلات بين الأشياء والحقائق، ويشترط فى هذا النوع أن يعبر عن حق. والتوهم أن يتوهم الشاعر بين شيئين صلة ليس لها وجود.

> (We ought to distinguish between two species of meanings and images in poetry: the one we term 'imagination', "takhayyul", and the other 'fancy', "tawahhum". Imagination [enables] the poet to elucidate the links that exist between things provided it expresses a reality. Fancy [by dint of which] the poet assumes a non-existent link between two things.)

Indeed, much has been said, in recent studies,[31] about the impact of Coleridge's concept of imagination and fancy on Shukrī, and through him or through ᶜAqqād, on the Dīwān Group. The question that poses itself here is not whether or not Shukrī was exposed to this fundamental romantic concept (for certainly he had a better command of the English language, and far more solid personal and formal education in English literature than his associates), but the question is whether or not he fully comprehended the concept in its literary and metaphysical bearings.

Whatever his grounding in the romantic aesthetic one thing is certain. Shukrī does nothing more than 'introduce' the distinction between 'imagination' and 'fancy.' Shukrī's twofold contribution in this respect is quite limited in that he gave currency to his adaptation of the concept probably for the first time in modern Arabic literary criticism, and in that he particularized the two, otherwise general terms 'takhayyul' and 'tawahhum'. Therefore, one would argue with reason that Shukrī's assimilation of the Coleridgean concept does not go beyond these limitations.

Judging Shukrī's differentiation between 'takhayyul' and 'tawahhum' in the light of his definition and illustrations, we are persuaded to conclude that takhayyul, which elucidates existing relationships between realities according to Shukrī, is quite different from Coleridge's definition of imagination as a "seminal principle" or faculty, 'vital' as opposed to "fixed and dead", "recreative", "satisfying", "struggling to idealize and unify." Coleridge, further, views imagination as "a living power, prime agent of human perceptions and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[32]

Similarly, Shukrī's version of 'fancy' implies the conception, or rather the assumption of relationships between apparently unrelated things. The illustrations Shukrī adduces in support of his definition reduces imagination to merely a paraphrase of the acceptable or common-sensical metaphorical language and imagery, and reduces fancy to the censured concept of hyperbole ("mubālagha") in classical Arabic literary criticism.[33]

If it is granted that Shukrī availed himself of the mere Coleridgean distinction, one would assume that Shukrī is more likely influenced by Arabic criticism on the one hand, and, on the other, by Bacon's and Addison's definitions, i.e., by the English Renaissance and Neo-Classicist perspectives on 'imagination' and 'fancy' than by romantic theorization.[34]

In 1916, if not earlier, Shukrī broached several essential aspects of poetry and the poets. His formulations, characteristically compact and unobtrusive, were later exploited by his colleagues in the Dīwān movement.[35] These formulations were also echoed by the Apollo Group, who held Shukrī in high esteem, and championed him against his adversaries.

To confront literary anachronisms, Shukrī identified the nature of the poet of today as he sees, or wishes to see, him, and contrasts him to the poet of yesterday. From his traditional function in the past as a drinking companion in the royal court or an ornament in the household of some prince, the poet has emerged as "the apostle of nature equipped with its ~~sweet~~ melodies with which he is to polish and stir the souls and replenish it with light and fire."[36] Shukrī insists that the poet derive his poetry from nature, and considers this source of inspiration (nature) to be the distinguishing factor between the grandeur and vulgarity in poetry.[37]

At one point, Shukrī in a characteristically romantic vein waxes very poetic in his idealization of the poet:

> All that exists is an instance of God's poetry
> and the poet is the most eloquent of his poems.[38]

[39] كل شيء في الوجود قصيدة من قصائد الله، والشاعر أبلغ
قصائده.

These and other similar definitions are essentially romantic and evidence the impact of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Shukrī's treatment of 'poetic diction' - quite a controversial issue in classical and contemporary Arabic literary criticism, is strongly suggestive of the Wordsworthean concept of poetic diction, reflected in his prefaces to the Lyrical Ballads.[40] Shukrī scorns the current assumption that the frequency of using the word demeans it, whereas the limited, rare use would render it noble.[41] Very much like Wordsworth, Shukrī insists on the use of simple everyday language, and concludes that what makes words noble or base is the way words are used, and the context they are used in.[42] ᶜAqqād develops these ideas later, and composes a whole collection of poems, ᶜĀbir Sabīl ("The Wayfarer") which mainly revolves around themes of daily life, all couched in everyday language.

The organic unity of the poem is theoretically a characteristic the *Dīwān* Group should be commended for, but the three members of the Group failed generally to achieve this unity in their compositions. Quite justifiably, Shukrī criticizes the long standing convention that the '*bayt*' (verse line) is the only unity. The '*bayt*' to him is merely a complementary part, and should not be awkward, unrelated in its place in the poem.[43]

Al-Māzinī and al-ᶜAqqād identify the orientation and approach of their "new trend ('*al-madhhab al-jadīd*') in poetry, criticism and writing"[44] in an unmistakably rhetorical vein. The orientation of the *Dīwān* movement is accordingly characterized as "human, Egyptian and Arabic" ("*insānī*, *Miṣrī*, *ᶜArabī*").[45] As for the approach, it admittedly purports to be more destructive than constructive as can be gathered from this statement:

> وقد مضى التاريخ بسرعة لا تتبدل ، وقضى أن تُحطّم كلُّ عقيدة [46]
> أصناماً عُبدت قبلها ، وربما كان نقد ما ليس صحيحاً أوجب وأيسر
> من وضع قسطاس الصحيح ، وتعريفه في كل حالاته ، فلهذا اخترنا
> أن نقدم تحطيم الأصنام الباقية على تفصيل المبادئ
> الحديثة .

> (History has gone on with an unchanging speed, and demanded that each belief destroy the idols which were worshipped before it. Perhaps the criticism of what is not valid is more binding and easier than the exact balancing of the scales and its definition in every respect. Therefore, we have chosen to give precedence to the destruction of the remaining idols over the detailed exposition of the new principles.)

Its rhetorics and shortcoming notwithstanding, the *Dīwān* movement represents an important transition in the history of modern Arabic poetry. The exponents of the movement aimed at purging the Arabic qaṣīda from its classical and mediaeval residues with a view to creating a new literary style, compatible with the spirit of the age. Shukrī, al-Māzinī and al-ᶜAqqād brought about this transition more by their literary criticism than by their poetic example which trailed far behind their theoretical ideals. The vigorous critical campaign launched by Shukrī in the prefaces to his poetical works, on the one hand, and by al-Māzinī and al-ᶜAqqād in the two volumes of the Dīwān, on the other, helped to dismantle the conservative literary establishment represented in poetry by Aḥmad Shawqī and Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, and in prose by Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī.

Even though the Dīwān movement has not made any significant experimentations in the direction of the poème en prose, it has already exemplified the possibility of innovation in the form and content of poetry, and paved the way for bolder subsequent experimentations in modern Arabic poetry. The western orientation of the Dīwān movement and its apprenticeship to the English Romanticists, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Hazlitt among others, served both as a catalyst for a long overdue change in the direction of Arabic poetry and as an impetus to enhance the horizon of Arabic literature beyond its traditional and somewhat parochial confines.

B.

More Recent Trends in Arabic Poetry

Aḥmad Zākī Abū-Shādī and his disciples picked up where the Dīwān movement left off, and brought the stream of Romanticism to a further stage of development and articulation. Whereas al-ᶜAqqād's poetry is at best marked by a cerebral appeal, Abū-Shādī's seeks to be subjective with varying degrees of success. Like al-ᶜAqqād, however, Abū-Shādī suffers from the dichotomy of the referential and the emotive as he uses the same monotonous poem-structure. Abū-Shādī's innovation does not transcend the framework of Arabic metrics. Among the major defects of his poetry is that he expresses his own experiences in a direct, prosaic, declarative fashion.

Abū-Shādī was instrumental in establishing a modern 'school' of poetry, and publishing the epoch-making poetry review, Apollo. Abū-Shādī had the makings of being the great poet of Egypt at the time, but the socio-political circumstances and literary rivalries did not allow him to assume any form of leadership as the country was in no mood for poets, great or mediocre. That was in 1927 when Muḥammad Maḥmūd, the then Prime Minister, sought to liquidate the popular movements, and dismantle all forms of political and social leadership.

The success of the short-lived review, Apollo, which aimed at establishing a new poetics as well as new standards of literary criticism, cost Aḥmad Zākī Abū-Shādī dearly indeed: he was forced to live in isolation until he decided to leave the country in 1946, and settle in the United States:

وكأنى وجودى المسىء بإحسانى لعصرى أو أنه لم يعنى [47]
ثم حالوا بين المثالية العليا لفكرى وبين شعبى وبينى
فترحلت حيث تحترم الأحرار ، وحيث الهواء طلق لذهنى

Had Abū-Shādī replaced his nebulous emotional belief in people with a degree of scientific understanding of Egyptian realities, he would have been the undisputed poet of the people. Abū-Shādī's departure abroad coincided with the formation of the most serious popular leadership in Egypt's modern history: The Patriotic Committee of Students and Workers, which advocated armed struggle against the occupying forces, and led several armed battles to drive the British troops out of the big cities, and was instrumental in 1951 in repealing the 1936 treaty, and in resuming the fierce armed struggle against the British army in the Suez zone.

The Apollo 'school' seceded, since 1933, almost entirely from public life. Its major poets followed their personal vein: Nājī sought refuge 'behind the clouds' وراء الغمام ; ᶜAlī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā journeyed overseas in the companionship of his 'strayed sailor' الملاح التائه ; Abu'l-Wafā kept heaving his 'burnt breaths' أنفاس محترقة . This wave of escapism, personal detachment, and social disengagement continued in Ṣayrafī's 'lost melodies' الألحان الضائعة , and reached its peak in Maḥmūd Ḥasan Ismāᶜīl's last dīwān, "Where to Escape?" أين المفر؟

It seems as though the social framework at the time did not yield an accommodating place for poets; accordingly, they took to private journeyings into their alienated egos. As a consequence, the Apollonianists indulged in self-made worlds of hyperbolic visions. Their music became convulsive; their social judgements superficial. In the final weighing of evidence, this 'school' managed a very limited degree of innovation in content, poetic diction, imagery, fancy, and the use of mythology. This poetic trend resulted in some form of polarization in Bishr Faris, whose rationalized Symbolism manifested the continuation of the mainstream of social disengagement.

Maḥmūd Ḥasan Ismā^{c}īl, the above-mentioned poet, stands midway between Romanticism and Symbolism. Even though he started his poetic career with "The Songs of the Hut" (أغاني الكوخ), he used the Egyptian countryside with its people, animals, tools, and local colour as symbols for his personal energy, and anxieties, not as a multiple human reality. Instead of conferring on the abstract tangible features, Ismā^{c}īl dislocates the perceptible aspects of his thoughts, and transforms them into blurred abstractions. His, in this respect, is antithetical to Nājī's style which whips up ideas into shape. Ismā^{c}īl stands out as a striking model of disengagement: he tried strenuously to subordinate his poetic talent to the patronage of the monarchy and the élite; and, with the gradual collapse of these authorities, the poet was further alienated, and eventually tumbled into the abyss of doubt.

What matters here is that the experimentations of these poets have not gone beyond traditional conventions, save, perhaps, with reference to poetic diction and choice of themes, all of which accounts for the unmistakable split in their writings between form and content. The continuity of this trend as a social phenomenon has been on the decline since 1946.

Now wealthier and more powerful in the wake of World War II, the conservative ruling class would not allow The Patriotic Committee of Students and Workers (PCSW) to upset its plans of bargaining, exploitation, and high treason, and hastily appointed Ṣidqī Pasha, which covered up for them in 1930, to cover up their overt treasonable acts.

If Ṣidqī succeeded to put an end to the PCSW, he could not stem the revolutionary tide until the tragedy of Palestine took place. The general wave of radicalization toppled the reactionary minority governments, and brought back to power the traditional popular leadership.

Originating in the midst of resistance activities and the struggle to build up Egyptian nationalism, modern Arabic poetry in Egypt took a new course in content and structure. The poet no longer allies himself with aristocratic patronage, lingers at clubs and cafes, or luxuriates in day-dreaming; he, rather, asserts himself:

48

هنا أنا، عند القنال، وفي يدي أمل الخلودْ
هنا أنا، والمدفع الرشاش، والحقد المبيدْ
وأبي هنالك في الحقول النائيات من الصعيدْ

(Here I am, by the Canal, while, in my hand, there is the hope of eternity; here I am along with my gun and destructive hate. And my father [attends to his duties] in the far-off fields in Upper Egypt ...)

He is then well within the battle-field, conscious and alert; his individual destiny is organically linked with the greater destiny of his nation:

49

أصدقاء ما غيرتني السنون
ولا غيرتك
أحبك ما زلت ... لكنني
صحوتُ على صرخات الجموع
وخطو الفداء إلى أمتي.

> (Oh beauty, the passage of time has neither
> changed me nor you ... I still love you, but
> I have woken up on the cries of the masses,
> and the march of extinction towards my nation.)

Although it is in many ways arbitrary and thus unreliable to pinpoint the chronology of literary periods and movements, I shall venture below a listing of the approximate dates of innovative movements in Arabic literature with the understanding that some have never ceased to exert varying degrees of influence in the regional circles and capitals of Arabic literature:

a. Al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya (U.S.A., 1920);
b. The Modernizing Movement of al-Dīwān (Cairo, 1921);
c. The Apollo Group (Cairo, 1932-1934);
d. The Free Verse Movement (Iraq, 1947-);
e. The Shi^{c}r Cénacle (Beirut, 1957-1970).[50]

In the period following World War II, the Arab poet was technically confronted with a number of prosodic forms:

1. The conventional poetics which has stood the test of time for well over fourteen centuries, and which consists in a melodic, mono-metered, mono-rhymed qaṣīda, with the line as its central unit;

II. Free verse form, which Rīḥānī is said to have borrowed from Walt Whitman, and which was not vital enough to compete with the classical qaṣīda; and

III. "Poetry in prose": a no-metre, no-rhyme verse genre, which has generated a strong conservative reaction on the one hand, and failed, on the other, to satisfy the ambitions of a younger generation of poets who hoped to develop, or go beyond, classical metrics. We use the term "poetry in prose" to denote the amorphous character of this kind of poetic writing and to avoid any likely confusion or overlap with the poème en prose as a distinct poetic genre. "Poetry in prose" is in our opinion another term for the shi^{c}r manthūr, practised in its early phases by Rīḥānī, Gibrān and Fu'ād Sulaymān, and, more recently, by Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, Tawfīq Ṣāyigh and Muḥammad al-Māghūt. We regard this kind of writing as an attempt to confer on prose a measure of poéticité. We also contend that whereas it can be related to native forms in Arabic it is usually either an extension of prose translations of western poetry or runs parallel to it. In this light, "poetry in prose" may well show both indigenous and occidental inspiration.

Although it may be claimed, with good reason, that Arab Romanticists (1900-1945), along with the short-lived Apollo Group, rendered the traditional qaṣīda responsive to modern needs, they failed to enlarge the ideological framework of the qaṣīda or extend its intellectual boundaries. Shawqī's and Zahāwī's attempts to renew and remodel the qaṣīda proved ineffectual because of the inability of the old form to cope with the exigencies of modern sensibility.

Paradoxically enough, the adherence of modern poets in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to tradition has sometimes revolutionary overtones. Such poets contend that abiding by tradition does not necessarily mean enslavement through the use of classical technique; they argue for revolt from within one's cultural and intellectual tradition, rather than from without. Others are influenced by Socialist and Marxist aesthetics. A third group is swayed by French and/or Anglo-American poetics. "The Music of Poetry," "Tradition and the Individual Talent," as well as other essays by Eliot, help to provide a theoretical impetus to the young poets, and to point the way towards thematic and technical innovations. Modern poets set more store by originality than imitation, and afforded at length to create a form of free verse which threw the gates of Arabic poetry wide open for ideological and technical developments.

This revolutionary movement in Arabic poetry originated in Iraq. The Iraqi pioneers of the movement, al-Sayyāb, al-Malā'ika, and al-Bayyātī, displayed much more poetic vitality, sensibility and freshness than their colleagues in the Lebanon, Syria, the Sudan, and Egypt. In many respects the Free Verse Movement was, in poetic terms, evolutionary as well as revolutionary. All things considered, the new metrical system--it may well be argued--has developed, under western influences, from classical Arabic tradition. These young poets who began their poetic career at the close of the 1940s, were greatly helped in their task by the pioneering efforts of the former generation who did much to develop a new poetic diction and a more flexible technique. Besides the significant experiments of *Mahjar*, the *Dīwān*, and the *Apollo* poets, the two transitional experiments of ^{c}Alī Aḥmad Bākathīr and Louis ^{c}Awaḍ merit our close attention.

In his translation of a single scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Bākathīr arrived at the conclusion that lines of two hemistiches with a prescribed number of feet and the method of mixing metres are not the ideal technique in verse drama. Therefore, in his drama *as-Samā' 'aw Ikhnātōn wa-Nafartītī* (Cairo, 1943), on an ancient Egyptian theme, he employed one one metre--*al-mutaqārab*--with an irregular number of feet in the lines, and called this method of versification *al-shi^{c}r al-mursal*, i.e. "the free blank verse". In so doing, Bākathīr figures as an important forerunner to the Iraqi poets, al-Sayyāb, and al-Malā'ika, who wrote poems of irregular line lengths with irregular rhyme schemes in 1947.

ᶜAwaḍ's experiment is a more conscious one and informed throughout by a masterly knowledge of the western tradition of literature. His collection Plūtoland and Other Poems is an epoch-making work that anticipated both theoretically and practically the essential characteristics of the Free Verse Movement. The volume, published in Cairo 1947--soon to be officially banned because of its revolutionary preface Ḥaṭṭimū ᶜamūd ash-shiᶜr ("Destroy the Conventional Rules of Poetry")--consists of his basic theories and twenty-nine poems on social and individual themes, fourteen of them written in literary Arabic, and fifteen in colloquial Arabic (spoken Egyptian), the earliest of which dates back as early as 1938, nine years before al-Sayyāb and al-Malā'ika published their controversial poems in 1947. Most of the poems were written in Cambridge, England, where ᶜAwaḍ was pursuing his post-graduate studies in English.

ᶜAwaḍ, in his search for a new vision of poetry was guided, as Mounah Khouri suggests,[51] by two factors:

1. His consciousness that what distinguishes his age from that of the neo-classic Arab poets is a new sensibility and, consequently, a new expectation with regard to modern Arabic poetry. For poetry, in ᶜAwaḍ's view,[52] is the human articulation which is most likely to change as sensibility changes.

II. His awareness that the prevailing outmoded tradition of Arabic poetry has a potential of tremendous renewal if the moderns use their sacred right to experiment and discover new directions in poetic development that may be found in western literary achievements as well as in certain elements of their own literature.

^{c}Awaḍ pinpoints, in his preface, two significant trends in the literary history of the Arabs: the creation, on the one hand, by the Andalusian poets of a genuine literary language basically preserved, and, on the other hand, the destruction of both classical language and classical prosodic system by the popular poets in Egypt and other Arab countries. The historical example of the emergence of a new Italian language free from the hegemony of Latin, encouraged ^{c}Awaḍ to try to evolve a new quality of vernacular poetry, the immediate result of which was the colloquial experiments in his collection. ^{c}Awaḍ experimented with three western genres: narrative (non-epic) poetry, the ballad, and the sonnet, which, in his view, had never been adequately presented in Arabic poetry. His remaining experiments derive from a westernized conception of poetry and a rejection of classical Arabic metrics. He convincingly invalidates the old assumption that the sixteen poetic metres exhaust all the music that exists in the world because he is acquainted with English and French metres which do not exist in Arabic. On the basis of these premises ^{c}Awaḍ urged the new poets to avoid the monotony of the monorhyme and to use blank verse as their medium. He, further, advised them "to seize the rhetoric and break its neck,"[53] thereby literally translating Verlaine's dictum in "Art Poétique": "Prends l'eloquence et tords-lui son cou!"[54]

In one of his experiments ^{c}Awaḍ borrowed from western poetry the prosodic device "enjambement" which allows the flow of meaning through more than one verse. In adopting this device, ᶜAwaḍ asserted the organic unity of the entire poem over that of the individual line. ᶜAwaḍ underscores the shift of inspiration, and defines the sensibility of his generation as follows:

> [55] جيلنا يحس الشعر أكثر مما أحسه جيل شوقى ... وجيلنا عاش
> فى الأرض الخراب التى انجلت عنها الحربان ، ورقص حول شجرة الصبار...
> وجيلنا يقرأ ڤاليرى ، و ت. س. إليوت ، ولا يقرأ البحترى وأبا تمام .

> (Our generation feels poetry more deeply than Shawqī's did. Ours is a generation of suffering and revolt; we have lived in the waste land left behind by the two world wars; we danced round the prickly pear ... We read Valéry and T.S. Eliot not al-Buḥturī and Abū-Tammām.)

In both capacities as a comparatist and poet-critic, ᶜAwaḍ helped to shape the new poetic technique which is now known as the "Free" Verse Movement. The salient characteristics of this movement in view of the facts and of ᶜAwaḍ's formulations may be conveniently divided into six main points:

1. The creation of a new poetic language which is effectively suited to the expression of the modern poet's sensibility.
2. The shift within what is essentially the same quantitative pattern, from the conventional bayt (line) to the tafᶜīla (foot) as the new basic unit.
3. The emphasis in the making of the new poem on its organic structure achieved through the poet's freedom to vary the length of his lines and their rhyming scheme.
4. The creation of new tafᶜīlāt (feet) and metres.
5. The departure from any formal metrical organization and the use of

"polyphonic prose" poetry.

6. The use of the vernacular instead of classical Arabic as a poetic medium.

These common features should neither preclude important individual differences, nor invite the hasty conclusion that the Free Verse Movement is a clear-cut literary school. The movement ramifies into probably four major streams:

1. The *engagé* poets who are directly influenced by an arabicized version of Sartre's existentialism. They are the Arab nationalists who are committed to the political causes of the Arab nation. In their poetry the content is as important as the artistic form, if not more.
2. The modernists, who are equally committed to the Arab cause, but reject the label *engagement*. These manifest the influence of Eliot and Pound among several others. They stress the aesthetic aspects of their poetry, and treat issues of a higher level in quest of new meanings. Because of the abstract nature of their poetry they do not enjoy much popularity among the masses. A major subgroup among these modernists is the *Tammūzites*, so called because of their belief in the salvation through rebirth and renewal, as symbolized by *Tammūz*, the Babylonian god of Spring. Their poems have an intellectual cast, dealing with philosophical problems like the restlessness of the spirit and avenues towards salvation.
3. Socialist-Realism is a third basic current, although quite limited in membership; its chief representatives are al-Jawāhirī, and al-Bayyātī. This subgroup is highly politically oriented, and addresses, in the main, the masses at home and in the Third World.

4. There are variations on, and exceptions to, these general groupings. Nizār Qabbānī is distinguished by his erotic lyrics as well as his concern with current social and political problems.

Although it is quite possible to trace a good many of these manifestations and innovations back to native soil and poetics on the ground that the chain of continuity and development has never been broken, this writer contends that the "Free" Verse Movement, and more particularly the *poème en prose* trend, are more the product of foreign influences than of an inevitably natural evolution from within.

In the history of modern Arabic poetry, a special place belongs to Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's experimentations with the genre of *poème en prose*. Although these apparently go back to the time he spent in Paris in the 1920s, the actual publication of the resulting poems only took place some four decades later in Cairo. It is therefore impossible to speak of any influence of these attempts before they appeared in print. To appreciate the significance of al-Ḥakīm's experiment, it is necessary that we acquaint ourselves with the intellectual milieu in which the experiment was undertaken.

According to the introduction of *رحلة الربيع والخريف* ("The Spring and Autumn Journeys"), in which these poems appeared for the first time (1964), one gathers that al-Ḥakīm used to write these prose-poems and put them away--in the drawer of his desk--until the time was ripe for their publication. Paris of the 1920s was a hectic training ground for many experimentalist movements in art and literature such as Dada, Surrealism, Cubism and so forth. Long before and after the 1920s, the debate about form in poetry continued unabated, and the French poets wrote at will in a variety of forms: *vers*, *vers libre*, *vers libéré* and *poème en prose*. Echoes of these trends and related literary thought reverbrate in al-Ḥakīm's largely autobiographical *زهرة العمر* ("The Prime of Lifetime"), and in the introduction to his two books: *يا طالع الشجرة* ("Tree Climber") and the work under review, *رحلة الربيع والخريف* . The world of modern art in Paris at the time seems to have influenced al-Ḥakīm both as a dramatist and experimentalist with other literary genres. With regard to prose-poetry he has this to say:

[56]

> ولقد أغرانى هذا الفن الجديد فى السنوات العشرين من هذا القرن،
> وأنا فى باريس، بالشروع فى المحاولة. فكتبت بضع قصائد شعرية نثرية
> من هذا النوع، وهو لا يتقيد ... بنظم ولا بقالب معروف،
> أهملتها فيما بعد بالطبع لأن اتجاهى الأصلى كان إلى المسرح.

> (This new art tempted me in the [first] twenty years of this century, while in Paris, to embark on this experimentation, and consequently I wrote some prose-poems of this kind which is not restricted ... by prosody or [any] known pattern--which I overlooked later, of course, because I was originally oriented towards the theatre.)

Al-Ḥakīm's prose-poems, which have the general title of " رحلة الربيع " ("Spring Journey"), may well be looked at from the three interrelated perspectives of technique, theme and genre.

Despite the apparent novelty of these poems, they retain a few technical characteristics from classical Arabic genres. Besides adhering to the typographical pattern of the *qaṣīda* in terms of lineation and line-division, al-Ḥakīm acknowledges a readily identifiable debt to the qur'anic style, diction and phraseology.[57] Al-Ḥakīm is also aware of, and admittedly influenced by saj^c, the time-honored rhymed, and sometimes rhythmical, prose that has existed in Arabic literature since pre-Islamic times. The content of these poems ranges from almost no-content or undecipherable content to the predominantly absurd, and from the abstruse world of thought to the unplumbed depths of the subconscious. From the conceptional and intellectual viewpoints, these prose-poems belong to al-Ḥakīm's theatre of the absurd. The date of their conception marks al-Ḥakīm's Parisian formative years and gestation phase, while the date of publication (1964) comes only two years after the appearance of his play يا طالع الشجرة (1962), which blazed the trail for the theatre of the absurd in modern Arabic literature and established al-Ḥakīm as the undisputed pioneer of the genre. It is also significant to note that these prose-poems were unearthed to be published together with the two plays of the absurd: " رحلة صيد " ("Hunting Journey") and " رحلة قطار " ("Train Journey"), which emphasizes the relation between these poems and the theatre of the absurd from the viewpoints of form and theme.

Structurally, al-Ḥakīm's prose-poem is largely traditional as it is demonstrably influenced by the Qur'ān, and by the long-standing tradition of saj^c. Al-Ḥakīm points out that some of these poems were written originally according to the prose pattern in which sentences and paragraphs were connected.[58] The prose-poems bear no titles--a feature that may well encourage the reading of these poems as one unit or one long poem. In fact, some of these poems are so thematically linked that one cannot read them otherwise.[59] Apart from three poems, which are presented on the page in the manner of the traditional two-hemistich verse, the rest of the poems are written in successive lines.

With the exception of the colon, which is used only twice, and the exclamation mark,[60] all the poems are devoid of punctuation. Still, by and large, the form of these poems is undeniably conventional. Though it sounds somewhat unlike his familiar and simple vocabulary, al-Ḥakīm's diction seems quite suited to the images and thematic subtleties in the poems.

The novelty of al-Ḥakīm's prose-poems resides: (a) in the very attempt to break away from the conventions of Arabic prosody, even though these poems still retain stylistic residues of Arabic literary traditions such as saj^c, verse typography and qur'anic echoes, and (b) in its surrealist import that relies heavily on the subconscious, the seemingly irrational and what I call "the circular infinity" as can be seen in the following example:

عيون وحش فى فضاء [61]
فضاء رأس ثَمِل
ثَمِل بكروم جبل
جبل عروقه ذهب
ذهب يشع فى هواء
هواء يلد هواء
هواء يتغذى بهواء
هواء من نسل هواء

(A beast's eyes in a void
a void of an inebriated head
inebriated by a mountain's grapes
a mountain whose veins are gold
gold that radiates the air
air that begets air
air that feeds on air
air begotten of air)

Al-Ḥakīm's experimentation, albeit belated and rather limited in scope, has for us at least an historical significance: it lends further credence to the genre of the poème en prose, and underscores French literature as a principal source of inspiration in the quest for new poetic forms.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See, for al-ᶜAqqād, Khulāṣat al-Yawmiyya (Cairo: Hilāl Publishers, 1912), al-Shudhūr, and for, al-Māzinī, al-Shiᶜr: Ghāyātuh wa wasā'iṭuh (Cairo: Busfūr Publishers, 1915), Shiᶜr Ḥāfiẓ (Cairo: Busfūr Publishers, 1915), and Dīwān al-Māzinī, Part I (Cairo, 1914) and Part II (Cairo, 1917).

[2] On Shawqī and Manfalūṭī, see al-Dīwān (Cairo, 1921; 3rd. impression, n.d. [197?]), pp. 5-53 and 77-114 respectively. Māzinī's ill-advised, vituperative sections on Shukrī in parts 1 and 2 were probably occasioned more by vengeance than by any critical, let alone objective, approach. Māzinī's attack comes in the wake of Shukrī's exposure of Māzinī's 'plagiarism' from the English Romantics as well as from other sources. See " صنم الألاعيب " ("The Idol of Tricks"), al-Dīwān, pp. 57-73 and 117-190. See also Shukrī, "Introduction" to his Khaṭarāt (1916), Dīwān (1960), pp. 272-273.

[3] ᶜIzz al-Dīn al-Amīn, Nash'at al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth fi Miṣr (Cairo, 1970), pp. 157-157: M.M. Badawi, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 87.

[4] ᶜAqqād, Shuᶜarā' Miṣr wa bī'ātuhum fi'l-jīl al-Māḍī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Miṣriyya, 1937), pp. 192-193.

[5] Mandūr, Al-Shi'r ba'd Shawqī, I (Cairo, 1955), pp. 53-55.

[6] Al-Tūnisī, comp. Fuṣūl min Naqd al-ᶜAqqād (Cairo, n.d.), p. 59. (Tūnisī's introduction "Fi'l-Ṭarīq ila al-ᶜAqqād"). See also ᶜAqqād, Sāᶜāt bayn al-Kutub (Cairo, 1950), p. 510, and Mandūr, al-Naqd wa'l-Nuqqād al-Muᶜāṣirūn (Cairo, n.d.), p. 147.

[7] Francis Palgrave, The Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics (First Published, 1861; Oxford, 1935).

[8] Shukrī, Dīwān, ed. Niqūla Yūsuf (Alexandria, 1960), p. 372.

[9] Ibid., p. 373. See also Niʿmāt Fuʾād who lists several examples of Māzinī's direct borrowings from English lyrical poetry, Adab al-Māzinī (Cairo, 1961), pp. 136-144.

[10] Shukrī uses such uncompromising terms as "maʾkhūdha" ('taken') and "manqūla" ('copied'), Ibid., p. 372.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] See ʿAlī Adham, "ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Shukrī," Al-Majallah, no. 26 (February, 1959), pp. 16-17.

[14] ʿAqqād and Māzinī, Al-Dīwān, pp. 57-73 and 117-190.

[15] Ibid., p. 65

[16] Shukrī, Dīwān, p. 373.

[17] Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism (New York, 1957), p. 257.

[18] Shukrī, Dīwān, p. 213.

[19] See the following random examples, "Waṣf al-Baḥr", pp. 118-120; "Bayn l-Ḥayāt waʾl-Mawt", pp. 213-214; "Al-Layl"; pp. 448-450 and "al-Shallāl"; pp. 512-514.

[20] Shukri, Dīwān, pp. 649-650.

[21] See pp. 27-28 above.

[22] Shukrī, p. 361.

[23] Shukrī, p. 290. See also a similar passage defining *ᶜāṭifa* in similar terms, p. 209.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 288.

[25] Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets* (London, 1964), pp. 1, 2.

[26] Shukrī, p. 363.

[27] *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London, 1962), p. 177.

[28] Shukrī, p. 287.

[29] "Introduction," *Biographia Literaria*, p. xix.

[30] Shukrī, pp. 364-365.

[31] To mention only a few, arranged here chronologically, see Muḥammad Mandūr, *Al-Naqd wa'l-Nuqqād al-Muᶜāṣirūn* (Cairo, n.d., but most likely published separately in periodicals in the late 1950s and early 1960s), p. 64. Mandūr quotes ᶜAqqād on the subject, and mentions the two terms in English; Mounah A. Khouri, *Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Leiden, 1971) pp. 179-180; David Semah, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics* (Leiden, 1974) p. 8 and M.M. Badawi, p. 90.

[32] *Biographia Literaria*, pp. xii n., 167 *et passim*.

[33] Shukrī, pp. 364-366. See also Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, *Tārīkh al-Naqd al-ᶜArabī* (Cairo, 1964), p. 44.

[34] Shukrī was well acquainted with Bacon and Addison. See *Dīwān*, ed. Niqūlā Yūsuf, "Introduction," pp. 11 and 373. Bacon uses "imagination" as one of the three functions of the rational soul: "history has reference to memory, poetry to imagination, and philosophy to reason." In his "Pleasures of the Imagination," Addison conceives of "imagination" as the

faculty by which images are called up. See William F. Thrall, *et alii*, *Handbook to Literature* (New York, 1960) pp. 234-235 and Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary History*, (New York, 1957), pp. 257, 261 and 381.

[35] Mandur, *al-Naqd wa'l-Nuqqād al-Mu‘āṣirūn*, p. 684 *al-Dīwān*, pp. 20 and 111.

[36] Shukrī, p. 288.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 287.

[38] *Ibid*., pp. 287-288.

[39] *Ibid*.

[40] Wordsworth, Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, ed. George Simpson (London, 1920), pp. 225-226.

[41] Shukrī, p. 368.

[42] *Ibid*., pp. 369-370.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 366.

[44] *Al-Dīwān fi'l-Adab wa'l-Naqd* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sa‘āda, January - February, 1921; 3rd. ed., Cairo: Maṭbū‘āt al-Sha‘b, n.d.),p. 3.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[46] *Ibid*.

[47] *Al-Ādāb*, III, 1 (January 1955), p. 17.

[48] Kamāl Nash'at, *al-Ādāb*, III, 1 (January 1955), p. 19.

[49] *Al-Adab*, III, 1 (January 1955), p. 19. Najīb Surūr's poetry.

[50] All these movements, save the last one, have been dealt with in both Arabic and English. I have had the opportunity to read some Ph.D. dissertations on the subject such as S. Moreh, "Strophic, Blank and Free Verse in Modern Arabic Literature," University of London, 1966; Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry (Leiden, 1977); N.F. El-Azma, "Free Verse in Modern Arabic Literature," unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 1969. I am also aware of other dissertations dealing specifically or generally with this area, but I could not have access to them. Of these, I shall mention the following:

a. Julie Scott Meisami, "New Forms in Modern Arabic Poetry," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1970;
b. R.C. Ostle, "The Rise and Development of Lyrical Poetry in Modern Arabic," Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1969;
c. A.M. al-Zubaydī, "Al-ᶜAqqād's Critical Theories, with Special Reference to the Dīwān School and to the Influence of European Writers upon Him," Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1966.

Other related references are listed in the bibliography.

[51] Mounah A. Khouri, "Lewis ᶜAwaḍ: A Forgotten Pioneer of the Free Verse Movement," Journal of Arabic Literature, I (1970), pp. 137-144. See also Khouri and H. Algar, An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry (University of California Press, 1974), pp. 14-16.

[52] Plūtōlānd wa Qaṣā'id 'Ukhrā (Cairo, 1947), p. 5.

[53] Ibid., p. 19.

[54] Verlaine, Oeuvres poétiques complètes, ed. Y.-G. le Dantec (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1942), p. 207.

[55] Plūtōlānd, p. 5

[56] Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Yā Ṭāliᶜ al-Shajara (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb wa

Maṭbaʿatuhā biʾl-Jamāmīz, 1962), p. 9. See also al-Ḥakīm, *Riḥlat al-Rabīʿ waʾl-Kharīf* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964), p. 8.

[57] Al-Ḥakīm expresses his admiration for the qurʾanic style and structure in several places of his introduction to *Riḥlat al-Rabīʿ*. The following short statement is quoted here as an illustration: "[The Qurʾān] is not metrical poetry, nor is it free prose, but is is an inimitable ("muʿjiza") poetic as well as musical energy," *Ibid*., p. 8. To prove his point, al-Hakim quotes four short *sūras* and presents them on the page after the fashion of verse. See *Ibid*., pp. 9-13. In sharp contrast to al-Ḥakīm's view of the style and character of the Qurʾān, Charles Henry Ford anthologizes George Sale's English version of "The Folding Up" ("سـورة التكوير") as a "poem in prose" "authored by Mohammed," "A Little Anthology of the Poem in Prose," ed. Charles Henry Ford, *New Directions*, XIV (New York, 1953; rpt. 1967), pp. 369-370.

[58] *Riḥlat al-Rabīʿ*, p. 7.

[59] There are several poems that evidence this characteristic. To instance only a few, see *Ibid*., pp. 25-28; 40-41.

[60] *Ibid*., pp. 22, 29.

[61] *Ibid*., p. 35.

III

AL-ḤĀJJ'S EARLY POETIC PHASE
AS ILLUSTRATED IN
HIS FIRST COLLECTION OF POEMS: LAN

Al-Ḥājj's poetry in his volume Lan (1960), which marks his literary début, does not purport to construct a new world on the débris of the existing world. The process of creation in Lan is purposeless. The word 'creation' in itself is incongruous to his poetry as creation by definition implies some measure of will, order or aesthetics at least.

The introduction he wrote to this volume in defence of qaṣīdat al-nathr (poème en prose) as a literary genre offers practically no proof that he believes in criteria, principles and/or objectives according to which poetry is to be written. The introduction merely lays the emphasis on one principle: freedom. What is commonly known as creation is to al-Ḥājj nothing more than a necessary action to stop suffocation. Poetry as he conceives it has an emancipating power, and, as such, it relieves him of inner corrosion and congestion. Like the Dadaists and the early Surrealists, he writes poetry by chance; he writes poetry because it is more benign to him than other literary forms and because it is better able to render his temperament. (Had he chanced upon another medium of release, would he have paid more attention, one wonders, to the artifice and structure of his poetry?)

Al-Ḥājj is more of a rebel than a poet, or put differently, he is a rebel first, then a poet. His poetry is his only revolutionary art. In point of fact, he sees his poetry as sheer madness.

> Is it at all possible for a young literary attempt to survive? My answer is no. This attempt has two options: suffocation or madness. It is through madness that the rebel triumphs and makes enough room for his voice to be heard.[1]

Madness is the anathema the freedom-seeker carries, that is, whoever wishes to emancipate himself from the slavery of mass concepts, behaviour and uniformity. All barriers between the madman and canons of uniformity are removed by the intellectual and spiritual solitude as well as the intellectual agony. In brief, it is al-Ḥājj's self-imposed exile. Even in his exile, he is both nauseated and terrified by the public sacred cows. In '^{c}Afāf Yabās'' he derides social conventions:

2 "ولا مرة إلّا حلمت أن يكون شعري أجعد، لأنّ الأملس شعر عاهرة سرية."

("I have often dreamt of having curled hair because the smooth and even hair is the hair of a clandestine prostitute.")

And when he screams:

3 صرعتُ تلك المحبات. يجب ألّا تكون العاقبة دماً.
ابحثوا عن طريقة أخرى.

(I conquered those lovers. The aftermath should not be blood.
Find [another] way.)

The poet regards this 'bloody' aftermath as a manifestation of male savagery. Al-Ḥājj or the poet in Lan shudders at the fact that the male lets the blood of his victim as a token of his triumph.

Al-Ḥājj develops further this primitive portrayal of the male in another poem, where he makes the man express himself as follows:

4 آخ ما أروع الذكر! أفترس صباي في المرآة ولا أرتوي، فظيع
ولا لي حد، دهائي أدهى شيء.

(Ah! How terrifying the male is! I ravish my reflection in the mirror and do not quench my thirst, infinitely abominable. My cunning is the most cunning thing.)

Al-Ḥājj, then, tells the woman through the man whose pride the woman has wounded:

" وتعلّى كالإله فى الحماقة ، اتركينى ألتذها ، أفركه كجبهة فى جيبى ... "

("Penetrate deeply in folly like God, leave me alone to relish it, to rub it, like a forehead, in my pocket ...") and as he 'relishes' this 'folly,' he first becomes furious with himself out of compunction, and, then, he reflects in self-pity:

[5] " نحن أطفالَ هذا الوقت ساقطون. لكننا كُسحاء ، عجائبُ وتُبكى. "

("We, the children of this time, are fallen.
But we are crippled, lamentable curiosities.")

A hidden feeling of guilt looms variously throughout the majority of his poems in Lan. At times, it takes the form of an unruly agitation, at which time the poet admits his sins, invokes the people's curses, and relishes in the meantime the pains and the sorrows in a manner quite reminiscent of Baudelaire's lines:

> Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance
> comme un divin remède à nos impuretés[6]

He also knows repentance both as a cure and revivication:

[7] " كل ما أذكر أننى فى الخندق ألتهم جسدى ، فأحشو جثتى ندمًا ، فيحيا. "

("All I recall is that I am in the trench devouring my body until it dies, then I stuff my corpse with repentance, then it revives.") He will never forgive himself for "that occurrence": " تلك الواقعة ."[8] and when he recalls it, he opens the poem in this fashion:

[9] فقد تملكنى الرعب ، لا أذكر
لا أذكر كيف تكوّن الدم على فخذىّ
وحيتَ أزنائى سد الوهلة .

(I was overpowered by fright, I don't recall ...
I do not recall how blood was formed on my thighs and
my ears became inflamed with panic.)

In the poem " صياح يقف ويركض ," his dialogue with the priest portrays him now as a restless fugitive who is afraid of his body, now as someone who is drowning in sin and cannot salvage himself. To the strident voices of his conscience and their reechoings he responds:

10

لا توزعوا حرارتكم على تغيروا مثل القيء
توقعوا خطاكم في ضميري كالشهادة.

(Do not distribute your temperature over me
do not attack [me] like vomit
do not throw your footsteps into my conscience
like a testimony.)

That the world sanctifies and legitimates "that occurrence" (" تلك الواقعة ") does not alter the fact that it is a crime in his opinion. To repent alone, to suffer his own hallucinations, to be terrified in private and remain unperturbed in public - to go through all this is not sufficient for him. Therefore, he will have to antagonize the other, to take pot-shots at the sacred establishments, and incur public curses. He wears the sins of others and confronts them with a face stained with the stigmas they try to conceal. He becomes the 'traitor' and the 'cursed.'

11

أنا أنفخ في البوق، أهيج الخيل،
أقنع الجيوش بالخيانة.

(I blow the trumpet, stir up the horses
I convince the armies of treason.)

The others cannot but ostracize him, and, in his accursed exile, he wreaks vengeance on himself. He accomplishes--in 'exile'--his uniqueness, finds and reaps the kind of pleasure he is after:

" أبحث عنك ، أنت أين ، يا لذة اللعنة! "[12]

("I have been looking for you,
Where are you, pleasure of the curse!")

'Unsī al-Ḥājj sees in himself the cursed one, and when he argues for the *poème en prose* in the "Introduction" to *Lan*, he contends openly that "the *poème en prose* is the creation of a cursed poet:[13] cursed in his body and in his heart."[14]

In the first section of his long poem " الحب والذئب ، الحب وغيري " al-Ḥājj says to the woman he loves: " ما أشد وفائي للظلمة "[15] ('How loyal I am to darkness'), and protests: "Your radiance is poised against my curses" (" شعاعك ضد لعناتي ").[16] He also asserts in the "Introduction" that " الملعون يضيق بعالم نقيّ "[17] ("The cursed person cannot stand a clean world.")

Al-Ḥājj is ill at ease with an apparently orderly world around him as he himself is beset with unsettling agonies and guilt feelings. He sees himself as "the leader of agony and ashes,"[18] and as someone in "whose marrow the bell has been swung."[19]

He has opted for madness and damnation as his only avenue for freedom. In madness, there are no preconceived schemes; no authority of logic or social obligation; no shadow of the people's sword. Damnation affords him the freedom of the suffering within; the freedom of falling; the freedom of penetrating the flesh (" حُرّيّة التوغل في الجسد "); the freedom of distraction and chaos.

Al-Ḥājj withdrew from the outside world and slipped into the recesses of his dark chaotic world. It was there that he became intensely aware of his body. In his poem " فقاعة الأصل " 'Charlotte' is characterized as independent, distinct in orientation and behaviour, and hostile to the poet. This peculiar character is cast in such a fashion that the hasty reader would take it for a woman. Charlotte, according to the author, is "what the finger ravels at its end and before the fingernail."[20] This finger-raveling, Charlotte:

> "تخطّتِ القافلةَ كشافةً تجسس."[21]
>
> ("has gone ahead of the caravan [as though it were] a spying scout.")

The implication is that the parts of his body are getting ready for the departure; for abandoning him. His body forewarns him:

> "إن العقد سينفرط. إننا متخلون عنك. إنك مبدد شر تبدد."[22]
>
> ("All shall dissolve. We shall abandon you. You shall be ruthlessly dissipated.")

Consequently, his only ally--his body--will dissolve. Al-Ḥājj gives a frightful account of its physical disintegration:

> [23] سوف تُنسَلُ نسلةً حتى يبرز لحمك العاري،
> ثم ينهار لحمك العاري، ويُسفر عن عظامك، ثم تلقى
> عظامك فى الليل.
>
> (You will gradually ravel out until your naked flesh appears, then your naked flesh will collapse and reveal your bones, then your bones will be thrown away in the darkness of the night.)

Why is al-Ḥājj so frightened of his body? The clue to this question lies outside his poetry. Al-Ḥājj wrote a study of Antonin Artaud and expressed his inordinate enthusiasm for the character of the French poet, dramatist and director.[24] Al-Ḥājj begins his study of Artaud by stating: "I will not be able to offer a coherent study on him. I am too obsessed ("يتربَّصُ عليَّ") with him to be able to."[25] What seems to be the affinity and/or the relationship between Artaud and 'Unsī al-Ḥājj? Artaud "had lived since his early youth in a sanatorium" because he was a drug addict and because he had cancer. Artaud is, in al-Ḥājj's view, "the great patient" and "the great cursed one." He was "thrown involuntarily there, and, thus, took, all his life, to self-absorption and escape starting with the penetration into the body."

Is it possible that al-Ḥājj is doing precisely what Artaud did when he wrote on Van Gogh and fully identified with him? Al-Ḥājj writes in the "Introduction" to Lan:

[26]

> نحن في زمن السرطان: هنا وفي الداخل ... المصابون هم الذين خلقوا عالم الشعر الجديد؛ حين نقول رامبو نشير إلى عائلة من المرضى. قصيدة النثر بنت هذه العائلة
>
> (We are at the time of cancer: here and within ... Those who are afflicted are they who have created the world of new poetry: when we say Rimbaud we point to a family of the sick. The poème en prose is the off-spring of this family.)

Charlotte, the finger-nail raveling out, tells him: "مرةً أُخرى لا تَخلق ومعك هذا الدم، أُيها الكلب!"[27] ("Don't be created again with this blood in your veins, you cur!"). He also opens his first volume of poetry with the poem " هُويَّة " ("Identity") setting forth his personal characteristics. Al-Ḥājj begins the poem with the fear motif, and as fear overcomes him, he manages to utter sardonically:

"النصر للعلم! سوف ينكسر العقرب، وأتذكر هذا كي أنجب بلا يأس."[28]

("Science be triumphant! The hand of the watch
will break and I shall keep this in mind to
beget children without despair.")

but slips, shortly after, into his convulsive dread of the foul blood, which he calls 'the hairless ghost' that "stares at him--from below--with its one eye."[29] Al-Ḥājj paints a terrifying picture of himself lying in bed gazing at the ceiling obsessed with "the ceiling dissolving in his heart," then "he rushes, gets flung, then the echo sweeps him away."[30] What could be the way out of this terrifying state? Could it be the introduction of " دم حديث " ("New Blood")?[31]

The poems in Lan are in the first place an expression of total disintegration: physically and spiritually - an expression of the cancer-ridden state of mind ("here and within"). References to cancer entail physical and spiritual cancer, corruption at the very roots of existence - corruption of life and blood " دم فاسد ":

السرية عريانة تقطع الصوت، بجلودنا مرقّعة، مرتدية تاريخنا، معروكة بدم حامل بالسم فاسد. لا أمل.[32]

This abiding theme assumes diverse forms, but it never alters its essential characteristics. Says al-Ḥājj " وصلت أمواج الدم الأسود إلى الحاجب "[33] ("The waves of black blood reached the eyebrows"), then he addresses the "mothworm":

" فرّخي كثيرا لتوحّدك جميع الأقاليم ، وأنا حيّ."[34]

("Hatch copiously in order for all regions to
worship you as one deity while I am alive.")

In part VIII of his relatively long poem " الحب والذئب، الحب وغيري " al-Ḥājj goes on to say in a similar vein:

" يا زمن العكر الدموي ، يا زمني ! "[35]

("My times of blood turbidity, O my times!")

He concludes his volume in triumphant despair:

لاوجهة لاوجهة! أسرطن العافية ، أهتك الستر عن غد السرطان."[36]

("There is no way out, no way out! I render
health cancerous. I unveil the morrow of
cancer,")

and the final exclamatory scream: " حُرّية "[37] ("Freedom!").

What is the meaning of this horrendous word, cancer, that punctuates his poetry? It may well be the expression of disintegration in body and spirit, as noted above, or in matter and universe. To use al-Ḥājj's metaphor, "cancer hatches in his thought;" in fact, it strikes roots in his private world. The diverse issues he heard about at a very early stage in his life--the woes of World War II, the devastation of Hiroshima, the impending atomic holocaust--are embedded in his memory and seem to have organic connection with this hitherto invincible disease. Radiation and cancer lead to disintegration, to inevitable destruction. Cancer in Lan is a metaphor for disintegration and collapse, a symbol for the insurmountable death. We are in the time of cancer when we dread our bodies or any sudden protrusion or recrudescence on the surface of our skin. We fear the times of blood turbidity ("العكر الدموى"), the times of intellectual cloisteredness. Death, an oft-trodden thematic path, has become less fearful than cancer. If death is a general fate befalling all, cancer is the fate that befalls some, cancer is the fate that befalls those who are cursed in their bodies. Cancer-ridden individuals are solitary because cancer is solitary. When al-Ḥājj addresses an original cancer cell, he says:

"داخلة أنت فينا لا كوباء ، أيتها العروة الأصلية."

("You are integrated into us, you original coil,
not like an epidemic.")

Epidemics spread like a collective state or condition, whereas cancer is secluded, hence its suitability to correspond to and express the loneliness of man, and by extension the loneliness of the poet. Cancer is therefore a twofold symbol: the savage fate and the loneliness of man in his confrontation with this fate. Al-Ḥājj holds that loneliness is a feature that tenaciously clings to human beings. The individual entity does not dissolve into small parts to coalesce with others: "I see nothing but my loneliness disgusted with itself."

Poetry to him is an act of emancipation and redemption. In order for this emancipation to be genuine, he should establish contact with others and his poetry should reach, in turn, the other. He views poetry as a bondage between the poet and the recipient.

"كلمة كلمة نحوك أعرج."

("Word by word, I limp towards you.")

He destroys the fences of frightening loneliness, behind which he, like other individuals, is preoccupied with himself.

"لا أُحبك لأنه لا عمل يقدر أحد ينقل لك حبّي."

("I do not love you because nothing can convey
my love to you.")

"فلتعصف الرياح ، ولتزح أسواري ."

("Let the wind blow and sweep away my fences")

Man is set off from others by material barriers, distances and winds:

"آه كل هذه الرياح بيننا ."

("Ah! All these winds are between us.")

The poet wishes, in his stifling loneliness, to attain to the other:

وفي يوم ممطر أصير وحلاً ألوثك ... أغدو على ثيابك
من عاداتك ... وإيه التراب ! يستطيع !

(On a rainy day I become mud staining you ...
I become a habit of yours on your clothes.
Ah the dust! It can!)

Dust can move and mix with the other, but he cannot. He always aspires to dissolve and reside in the other.

"لو أطلع من توتري كقارة من بحر ، ونيئاً أُهبُّ في عينيك ."

> ("If only I would rise from my tension like a continent from a sea, and be poured raw in your eyes.")

For al-Ḥājj, among the many oddities of life is that it begins with separation, not union. The womb, he obliquely suggests, is man's lost paradise. In the womb, man was in union with the other. Why does he, the long-exiled, return to his mother-land.

"بَدَلَ أن تَخْرُجَ من أُمِّكَ تَزَوَّجْها."

> ("Instead of coming out of your mother, marry her.")

He aspires in all his actions to unite with the other. Poetry to him is the bridge between him and the other. Furthermore, poetry is more benign to him than the others, and, indeed, more capable of carrying him "raw", distraught and demystified.

The word is logical; prose is both logical and rational. Intensive thought is only conducive to disruptive communication among people. In poetry, however, al-Ḥājj can manipulate the word freely. The word itself is, like him, lonely, unable to mix with the other word. How could the word become a bridge to connect his lonely island with the archipelago of others?

"الكلمات تتلاحق. عوض ذلك يجب أن تتداخل."

> ("Words follow one another in close succession. They should instead interpenetrate.")

The reader of al-Ḥājj keenly feels that the poet is invariably battling with the word. His style evidences this sustained confrontation with Arabic. There can be no language spacious enough to render or accommodate his congestion. It is usually assumed that language, that is, any language as such, is to a considerable extent based on orderly construction and logical linkages. The customary geometry of language has been shaken in al-Ḥājj. The relation between him and his vocabulary can conveniently be likened to the relation between a temperamental master and a fugitive slave:

- "لو أطحنك، يالعثمة."

- "أردت نعمة القدرة على القتل لأفتك بالكلمات منذ فجرها إلى أبدها."

- "عيون اللغة الأولى فتحوها، وقبل مجيئي هتكوها، يا حبيبتي."

- "أبحث عن صيحة عذراء، همهمة طائشة، لا أجد."

> (-"If only I could crush you, stammering!")
>
> -"I wanted the luxury of being able to kill to assassinate words from their dawn to their eternity."
>
> -"They had opened the first eyes of the language, and before I came, my love, they had unveiled them."
>
> -"I am searching in vain for a virgin cry, a rash, inarticulate utterance.")

Has al-Ḥājj ever managed to invent a language able to render his vastly chaotic and disorderly thought? If it is at all possible to describe an old familiar language as a newly invented language, that would be a fitting description of al-Ḥājj's Arabic in Lan. Both linguistic and intellectual moulds are absent. The author, additionally, omits a great deal of the cementing particles: the conjunctions and connectives. In order for his Arabic to be congruous with his permanent aspiration for union, he renders the intransitive verbs transitive, i.e. operating immediately on the direct object. This means that the pronoun which was to be the second member of the genitive construction has become a direct object. The genitive construction is not so convincingly forceful as the action involving a doer or a recipient. The use of the verb carries weight, vigour and violence as can be seen in these examples:

-("I am burning, and coldly I enter you.")	- "أحترق، وببرود، أدخلك."
-("As I was looking I saw myself metamorphosed into seeing you.")	- "كنت أنظر فأراني صرت أراكِ."
-("I direct the wind--the winnowing fork that throws me off.")	- "أوجّه الريح، وهي مُذْرِيَتي."
-("I muse about you." [lit.. I think you.])	- "أُفَكِّرُكِ."

Al-Ḥājj endeavours and manages to charge this very language with the violence of his torn ambition for unity, his ambition to reduce the distance among words and omit a great deal of constructions and conjunctions, whose main function is to stretch and explain. The very fact that his Arabic, and more so poetic diction, consists primarily in the verb retains, for his emotions, three qualities: vividness, violence and tension. The verb is the axis of his images. He has excluded the still images that show perceptual forms, or reveal artificial or extrinsic interrelationships. The image in this sense runs parallel to painting, and belongs as such to the visible realm.

Al-Ḥājj's image emanates from within, from the thick darkness, and in darkness the outer form disappears whereas the verb remains. Those images that emanate from within have hidden psychological ties as well as diverse suggestions. Al-Ḥājj's images may not be readily called images. Any image that does not reflect experience, or does not function as a vehicle for experience does not have enough attraction for him. This is probably why al-Ḥājj is able to retain for both his feelings and thoughts their disorder and naturalness to a great extent. Al-Ḥājj has excluded the images that have outward artificial links such as descriptive and/or symbolic elements which promote the crystallization of the experience through parallels and analogies. When the poet projects his inner world on these analogies, he produces the echo or the shade of his experience, as it were, the actual event.

Man has invariably projected his feelings and imaginings of the universe on aspects of the external world; this is the case of myth. Similarly, poetry followed this path: it has always cast about for analogies and receptacles for its raw material, traversing the long tortuous channels of rhythm, rhyme, rhetorics and symbolism, etc.

The commonly held assumption that poetry is distinct from prose on the ground that the former is a mode of indirect expression whereas the latter is direct has led to gross misunderstandings. Prose cannot be a direct expressive mode because it uses all the possible tools at its disposal. The distance, in prose, between the inner state and the expressed state is considerable. Whenever this distance narrows down, poetry and prose come closer together. The avant-garde movement in poetry has set itself the task of narrowing down this distance, and, in a sense, this accounts for the general revolt against rhythm, rhyme and rationalism in classical Arabic poetry.

The image in the majority of Arabic poetry is occasioned by the external world and seems to have only tenuous links with the inner world. This is true of a good many of Sa^{c}īd ^{c}Aql's images:

You and the yacht:
When you both set sail in the
soft-blowing winds
amid the pretexts and the
vibrating scents
from the vast ocean
though jaundiced by the
setting sun,
almost blossomed the moment
You beckoned.

38 أنتَ واليختُ وإذ تبحرا
في الرياح الليّنات الهبوب
في التعلّات وهفهفة الطيوب
من خضمّ ليلكيّ الغروب
كاد مذ أومأتَ أن يزهرا.

This poetic passage is predominantly descriptive and pertains as such to the external world around ^{c}Aql.

Modern Arabic poetry offers another type of images which, though residing mainly in the external world, reflect in part the inner world of the poet. Such images possess the power of surprise and suggestiveness, but these derive from the external material beauty that binds these images together as the following examples show:

39

-("And I wept--I, who is
the musical reed of cold
winter and big rose of
disgrace.")

- "وبكيتُ أنا مزمار الشتاء البارد
ووردة العار الكبيرة."

-("My memory scurries like a
prostitute from one street
to another.")

- "ذاكرتي تهرول كالساقطة بين
الشوارع."

-("O my homeland, you shaggy-
haired Bedouin ")

- "وطني، أيها البدوي المشعث
الشعر"

-("Here I am alone, like a
squirrel, and my legs are
at the point of death."
[lit.: my legs are the
concretization of near-death])

-("From this very night I
shall never sleep until
I become a vagrant king.
For you, I cast off my crown
I am lost like pigeons,
I tread on tobacco,
I tread on dreams.)

40
- "ها أنا وحدي كسنجاب
ورجلاي احتضار."

- منذ هذه الليلة لن أنام
حتى أصير ملكاً مشرداً.
لأجلك
أنفض تاجي صعداً
أضيع كاليمام
أخطو على التبغ
على الأحلام.

These images in the poetry of al-Māghūṭ and Abū-Shaqrā obviously belong more to the external world than to the poet's inner experience. In al-Māghūṭ's apostrophe: "My country, you, shaggy-haired Bedouin," the Bedouin sticks out of the painting, whereas the poet's vision or rather visualization of his homeland remains blurred, shrouded in the mist of vagueness. Similarly, Abū-Shaqrā's "sqirrel-like loneliness" points more to the squirrel's loneliness than to his own.

Al-Ḥājj's poetry is not entirely devoid of such images, but they are relatively few as his empathization with the outside world is less pronounced than in the poetry of the afore-mentioned and other poets.

As a rule of thumb, nature and the woman never occur in his poetry as stereotypes or elements of mere embellishment. The following is a random sampling of al-Ḥājj's images that are largely anchored outside himself:

- "أنتحب كسنبلة في الريح."

-("I sob like an ear of grain
in the wind.")

- "هناك شعر كالزجاج المكسور."

-("There is hair like broken
glass.")

- "تتوردين كأميرة."

-("Your face is aglow like a
princess.")

- "آكل كالأحدب غنيمتي."

-("I eat my prey like a
hunchback.")

- "مشروبة كالنبيذ"

-("drinkable like wine")

- "يقظان كالسمكة"

-("awake like fish")

The use of the comparison particle " ك " (something often warned against and censured by the Surrealists) exteriorizes the individual experience, and thus dilutes the intimacy entailed therein. The reader would see these images in the 'compared to' which is at one or more removes from the 'compared', be that the poet himself or any of his thematic preoccupations.

The following images of the type that frequently occurs in Lan, seem to be much closer to al-Ḥājj's own world, and probably more intimate:

- "أحشائي تهاجم الآنية تنسفها."

-("My bowels assail the vases[,]
blast them.")

- "رفعت ضحكك وهربت."

-("You folded [lit. lifted] your
laughter and fled.")

- "عدوت ألتقط نارًا سبقتني إلى رجائك
دقة عيني الهمجية."

-("I raced to pick up some fire[;]
the beat of my savage eye went ahead
of me to implore you.")

- "تؤدين أدوارك في عينيّ،
تفتحين شبابيك نخاعي."

-("You perform your rôles in my
eyes, you open the windows of
my bone marrow.")

-("Thrust your avoidance into my heart.")

- "اغرزي ابتعادك
في كبدي."

-("My screams are bruised under
the sun and fear.")

- صراخي يُشْتَمُ تحتَ الشمس
والخوف.

Al-Ḥājj's imagism as can be gathered from the above examples accounts for the obscurity of his poems in Lan, and in part for the controversial nature of his literary débût in the Arab world. These images are difficult in varying proportions because they cannot be readily translated according to the logic of external associations.

Al-Ḥājj views poetry in the first place as an act of emancipation, as a process of transport and meeting with the 'other,'--but poetry, his transportation medium, as it were, does not bring down the walls of his seclusion, or unite him with, or enable him to reside in, the other or others. The only act that takes him out of his solitude, and helps him to integrate fully into the other is love, that is precisely love, not the woman. In other words, the act not the agent. The woman, as already noted, is absent from his poetry as an element of embellishment. She is there, however, as party to the process of penetrating the poet's solitude and meeting the 'other'. Al-Ḥājj's expression of love concretizes his tendency towards solitude and incarnation.

أفكّرك! أفكّرك! أدور كوحشٍ سعيد أبحث
عن مركزي خارج فكري، أنت.

(I intensively think of you! I turn around like
a happy beast, looking for my centre outside my
thought, you.)

"الآن تلتوين فيَّ كأنكَ المجرد."

("Now, you spiral in me as though you were the
abstract.")

Love in al-Ḥājj's poetry is wayward, yet afraid and tenacious; wild, yet tortured and feverish:

- "حلزونيّ تلاشٍ، أُحدب، مقعّر."

-("[My loye is] spiral and
distraught; curved and hollow.")

- "صراخي يُسحَنُ تحت الشمس
والخوف."

-("My screams are bruised
under the sun and fear.")

There is no room for stable, smooth or serene emotions in his poetry. Even his physical whims cannot last long. Is love, as he claims, a veritable emancipation?

أُعطيتُ قشّةَ البحر الوحيدة، فلأتعلّقْ بقشّة البحر الوحيدة،
غدًا بعد كسرها أطير.

(I was given the sole straw of the sea. Let
me then hang on to the sole straw of the sea.
Tomorrow after breaking it, I shall fly away.)

Love, the long-awaited emancipator, is no more than a straw appearing in the seas of loneliness and perdition. He who drowns has no choice in his despair and loneliness but to hold fast to this straw. Love, therefore, cannot afford emancipation; rather, it gives an ephemeral hope, movement in the stagnation of despair.

Because love is a permanent yearning, al-Ḥājj would say:

"عرفتُ أن الغارق لجوج ، والبحر رافض."

("I have realized that the one who drowns is unyielding and that the sea is rejecting.")

"من منفايَ أُلوّح وأصرخ: لا تتوقف أيها العدو، يا حبيبي."

("From my exile, I wave and shout: Do not stop, you enemy, my love.")

In order for this love to endure and integrate, al-Ḥājj tries his utmost to keep his distance from the woman whom he calls " فاعلة الجرح " (lit. the one who wounded him). He speaks frankly of this distance:

"أشمك بلا خضاب ، وأحبك كثيرا ، المسافة ترفعك في خيالي."

("I smell you without any dye and love you much. The distance between us elevates you in my imagination.")

"المسافة تدعى الحلم."

("Distance is called dream.")

قارتُك عينُك أطلب الرزق في سنابكها فأرتطم
بوجهي وإرادتي.

(Your continent is your eye, I seek my livelihood in its paths, then I collide with my face and my will.)

The influence of love as an emancipation from the curse of the body and spirit as well as from solitude, is an unmistakable feature in

Lan. Whereas the first part of this collection is an expression of a state of disintegration, collapse and physical fright, the second part and precisely al-Ḥājj's long poem " الحب والذئب، الحب وغيري " ("Love and the Wolf, Love and Others") strongly suggests a general air of serenity, in which " الشبح الأجرد " ("the hairless ghost") and " العين الأفقية " ("the horizontal eye") are conspicuously absent. Once the poet, however, feels that the sea straw is slipping away from him, he is seen again in his last poem agitated, inflamed and mad. Furthermore, the ghost of drowning looms large in the concluding poem, in which the straw is about to let go of him:

أرخيتني، يا قشة البحر، لم ترخيني، لا فرق! أغرق فهذا هو.
أغرق أو أطير أو أنام. لا وجهة! أسرطن العافية،
أهتك الستر عن غد السرطان
حرية!

(O Sea straw! You let go of me; you did not
    let go of me.
There is no difference! I am drowning, that's
    what it is.
I drown, I soar or sleep. No [specific] direction.
    I render
health cancer-stricken. I unveil the morrow of
    cancer.
Freedom!)

Adonis distinguishes Arabic poetry thus:

41 الشعر عندنا قضايا عامة، مشاكل وأفكار عريضة واسعة؛ إنه مواضيع ونظريات، وما يعوزه هو (الدخول) فى هذه المواضيع، هو (تقمص) و(التسلل) إليها و(الغوص) فى أسرارها لكى تتضح من الداخل.

> (Our poetry deals with general issues, vast problems and thoughts. Poetry is [merely] themes and theories. What it really lacks is penetrating into these themes, piercing them and making its way into them, and the fathoming of their secrets in order for those secrets to become clear from within.) Author's emphasis.

That is precisely what al-Ḥājj has done: he abandoned the external, the ephemeral pleasures of the flesh. Instead, he penetrated it. Forms and apparent aspects of the problems failed to catch his eye; rather, he experienced loneliness and the disintegration of the world from within.

Has al-Ḥājj gone too far afield to be fully appreciated? Does his voice sound strange because of the remoteness of his world?

The poetic substance in al-Ḥājj occurs in Lan without any prior conscious preparation. He penetrates the dark recesses which the majority of modern Arabic poetry dared not to penetrate. Al-Ḥājj in his exploration seems to have forgotten about his readers. That accounts for the fact that he does not attempt any clarity, decoration, or rhythm, nor does he attempt the use of the Arabic language in its conventional way.

FOOTNOTES

[1] "Introduction," Lan (Beirut, 1960), pp. 8-9.

[2] "ᶜAfāf Yabās," Lan, p. 41.

[3] Ibid., p. 42.

[4] Ibid., p. 102.

[5] Ibid., p. 69.

[6] Les Fleurs du mal (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1961), p. 10.

[7] Lan, p. 41.

[8] Ibid., p. 42.

[9] Ibid., p. 41.

[10] Ibid., p. 42.

[11] Ibid., p. 101. See also " نشيد البلاد " al-Ḥājj's version of a national anthem where his satire and socio-political criticism reach their peak. It is worth noting that the word " خائن " ("traitor") is used as the only refrain to the various paragraphs of the poem. Lan, pp. 74-76.

[12] Ibid., p. 17.

[13] Cf. "poète maudit."

[14] Ibid., "Introduction," إن قصيدة النثر... عمل شاعر ملعون... ," p. 15.

[15] Ibid., p. 80.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 15.

[18] Ibid., " قائد اللوعة والرماد ," p. 99.

[19] Ibid., " هز الجرس في نخاعه ," p. 67.

[20] Ibid., p. 54.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 55.

[24] Shi^cr, IV, 16 (Autumn 1960), 69-106.

[25] Ibid., p. 94.

[26] Lan; "Introduction," p. 15.

[27] Ibid., p. 55.

[28] Ibid., p. 18.

[29] Ibid. " تحدجني عينك الوحيدة من أسفل "

[30] Ibid. " أُهرول وأُقذف يكنسني الصدى" و "السقف يجول في قلبي ," p. 19.

[31] Lan, p. 21.

[32] Ibid., "The mothworm, naked as it is, stifles the voice. It

is decorated with our skin, dressed up in our history, rubbed in pouring blood which overflows with venom. There is no hope," pp. 29-30.

[33] *Ibid.*, 30.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] Sa^{c}īd ^{c}Aql, *رِنْدَلى* (Beirut, 1963), p. 105.

[39] Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, *حزن فى ضوء القمر* (Beirut, 1973), pp. 38, 53.

[40] Shawqī Abū-Shaqrā, "الربع فى السفينات," *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 13 (Winter 1960), 25-27.

[41] *Shi^{c}r*, V, 18 (Spring 1961), 160-161.

IV

AL-ḤĀJJ,
THE CONCEPTION OF THE POÈME EN PROSE, AND THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT NATIVE TRADITION AND FRENCH INFLUENCES

A

The poème en prose is lexically defined as follows:

> A composition able to have any or all features of the lyric, except that it is put on the page--though not conceived of--as prose. It differs from poetic prose in that it is short and compact, from free verse in that it has no line breaks, from a short prose passage in that it has, usually, more pronounced rhythm, sonorous effects, imagery and density of expression. It may contain even inner rhyme and metrical runs. Its length, generally, is from half a page (one or two paragraphs) to three or four pages, i.e., that of the average lyrical poem. If it is any longer, the tensions and impact are forfeited, and it becomes--more or less--poetic prose.[1]

Much has been written about the genre in French, English and other literatures in European languages. For our purposes, of special importance is the description offered by al-Ḥājj in Lan. In view of the historical importance of the way al-Ḥājj has presented the poème en prose in the Introduction to Lan, I shall proceed to give a summary of his formulations with some comments.

Al-Ḥājj begins his discussion of the genre by posing the question whether or not it is possible to make a poem out of prose.[2] He answers the question in the affirmative on the ground that verse ("نظم") is not the real distinction between prose and poetry. He, further, argues that all living literary traditions have produced great poetry in prose. Insofar as poetry is not defined in terms of metre and rhyme, nothing, in al-Ḥājj's opinion, would preclude forming poetry from prose, or poème en prose from prose poetry.

This does not mean, however, that prose poetry (" الشعر المنثور "), and poetic prose (" النثر الشعري ") are equated with *poème en prose*. But these forms, especially the rhythmic poetic prose, are primary elements in what is termed as 'the lyrical *poème en prose*,' in which rhythmic prose is indispensable. The *poème en prose*, however, does not have to be exclusively lyrical because there are *poèmes en prose* that resemble tales, and ordinary *poèmes en prose* devoid of rhythm. Al-Ḥājj cites, as examples for the latter, the "Song of Songs" and the poetry of Saint John Perse. Rhythm ("التوقيع") is replaced in the *poème en prose* by the "closed unified entity" (" الكيان الواحد المغلق "), the poet's vision or the profundity of the unique experience, i.e., through the illumination that emanates from the structure of the poem, be it a circle or square, and not from isolated phrases or sentences, or from the clustering of radiant pleasant words.

Perhaps when one reads aloud a poem of this kind (by Henri Michaux, Antonin Artaud, ...) "for the sake of pleasure and ecstasy" (" للالتذاذ والترنح "),[3] one may be dismayed and lose confidence as one will not find any magic or entertainment. The impact of the poem materializes when the poem attains its completion in the reader as a coherent unity, free from schisms amongst its parts--its impact occurs as a totality, not as parts, lines, or words. Hence, Edgar Allan Poe's recommendation that a poem be short. This is all the more applicable to prose because the *poème en prose* needs more coherence than the metrical poem, otherwise it relapses into its matrix, i.e., prose and such prose ramifications as the essay, story, novel and reflective writing.[4]

Al-Ḥājj wonders whether or not it is possible to establish a poem on the basis of prose without using the tools of prose; then, he proceeds to state that the *poème en prose* may have recourse to such tools of prose as narration, digression, and description, but, as Suzanne Bernard says, "the *poème en prose* must elevate these elements, and make them 'function' collectively and for poetic ends and nothing else."[5] This means that the narrative and descriptive lose in the *poème en prose* their 'temporal end.' These prose elements merge into an 'atemporal block,' namely, the *poème en prose*, thus shedding their earlier functions.

Al-Ḥājj lists the following among the factors that pave the way for the emergence of the *poème en prose*:[6]

I. The improvement of prose and elevation of its standard;

II. The weakness and decline of traditional poetry;

III. The consciousness of a different world commanding a different attitude, an attitude that imposes, in turn, form on the poet;

IV. The free rhythm, based on the principle of the foot (" تفعيلة "), not the verse-line (" بيت. "), has been instrumental in the last ten years[7] in bringing poetry and prose closer together.

(This phenomenon is more pronounced among Communist and Realist Arab poets who moved closer to prose, not only in their style and diction, but also in the atmosphere and manner of expression. Al-Ḥājj also observes the standard poets' [" شعراء المستوى "] closeness to prose through simplification of vocabulary and sentence structure. As for their experience or attitude, it remains intact behind its hard artistic 'immunity.' The two diametrically opposed exponents are ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī representing the Arab Communists, and Yūsuf al-Khāl representing the other group.)

V. Translations, especially from western poetry.

These factors, among other considerations in al-Ḥājj's opinion, have paved the way somewhat for the emergence of this new genre, at least from the viewpoint of form, but the literary taste was not yet naturally disposed for it.

Al-Ḥājj suggests that any attempt to explain fully the essence of the poème en prose would require more room and go beyond the scope of his "Introduction." He finds it convenient, however, to borrow whatever suits his purpose from Suzanne Bernard's important book, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours. Although al-Ḥājj and Adonis admit, in a general way,[8] that they have used Bernard's study as their main source of information on the genre, al-Ḥājj, much more than Adonis, tends to translate almost literally whole passages from the French author without giving her due credit, thus leaving Arab readers with the impression that the thoughts and conclusions included in the 'Introduction' are entirely his own. To illustrate this point, I shall quote below parallel passages from al-Ḥājj and Bernard on the essential characteristics of the poème en prose.

Al-Ḥājj delineates the genre in this fashion:

> [9] لتكون قصيدة النثر قصيدة نثر، أي قصيدة حقا، لا قطعة نثر
> فنية، أو محملة بالشعر، شروط ثلاثة: الإيجاز (أو الاختصار)،
> التوهج، والمجانية. فالقصيدة، أي قصيدة ... لا يمكن أن تكون طويلة،
> وما الأشياء الأخرى الزائدة، كما يقول بو، سوى مجموعة من المتناقضات. يجب أن تكون
> قصيدة النثر قصيرة لتوفر عنصر الإشراق، ونتيجة التأثير الكلي المنبعث من وحدة
> عضوية راسخة.

> (In order for the poème en prose to be a poème en prose, i.e., a real poem, not merely a piece of artistic prose, or a piece of prose loaded with poetry, three conditions [should be met and these are]: brevity, intensity, and gratuity, for it is not possible for the poem, any poem ... to be long; the other superfluities being according to Poe no more than a mass of contradictions. The poème en prose should be short so as to augment the element of illumination and the total effect resulting from the [poem's] firm organic unity.)

This closely echoes Bernard's conclusions:

> J'ai tenté d'indiquer ... les conditions nécessaires pour que le poème en prose atteigne sa beauté propre, c'est-à-dire soit vraiment un "poème" et non un morceau de prose plus ou moins travaillé: brièveté, intensité, gratuité sont pour lui, nous l'avons vu, non des éléments de beauté possibles, mais vraiment des éléments constitutifs sans lesquels il n'existe pas ...[10]

Suzanne Bernard's book has manifestly influenced Adonis and al-Ḥājj in different ways, which is only natural. It is to be noted that Adonis is able in most cases to transform his borrowings from Bernard into something plausibly fresh. Al-Ḥājj takes Bernard's formulations at their face value. A good case in point is the two writers' Arabic rendering of the essential characteristics of the *poème en prose*: 'brièveté,' 'intensité,' and 'gratuité,' for whereas al-Ḥājj *translates* them as 'الإيجاز', ' التوهج,' and ' المجانية'[11] Adonis *seems to interpret* them as ' الكثافة والبلورة ' ('density and crystallization'), ' الوحدة العضوية ' ('organic unity') and ' الإشراق ' ('illumination').[12] The technical terms Adonis prefers, however, are not entirely his own as Bernard uses them in several places, especially in Chapters III and IV of her book, namely, "L'Esthetique du poème en prose," and "Conclusion."[13] I hope it is not too presumptuous to suggest that, instead of reading Bernard's sizable book in its entirety, the two Arab writers have found it sufficient to derive their information on the genre from two different chapters, i.e., Chapters III and IV.

Our assumption about al-Ḥājj's partial or selective reading of Bernard may help us to understand his confusion and self-contradiction on the question of length in the *poème en prose*. As indicated above, al-Ḥājj rules out length in poetry, and particularly in the *poème en prose*. It is likely that he would have qualified his position had he read carefully Bernard's discussion of the structure of the narrative *poème en prose* in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, which is noted for its length.[14] The masters of the genre in French literature, whom al-Ḥājj admires and cites quite often, such as Rimbaud, Michaux, Artaud, and Saint John Perse, write at will short and long *poèmes en prose*. *Lan* itself brings al-Ḥājj's self-contradiction into sharp focus, for although the majority of the poems are comparatively short, the last poem in the collection, " الحب والذئب، الحب وغيري " runs up to twenty-six pages.[15] Furthermore, al-Ḥājj published in 1975 his fifth volume, *الرسولة بشعرها الطويل حتى الينابيع* ("The Inspiration of the Flowing-Hair Prophetess"), which consists of one long poem.[16]

With regard to the genesis of the *poème en prose*, al-Ḥājj makes the assertion that the genre appeared as a rebellion against austerity and bondage. *The poème en prose* is still what Rimbaud asked for when he sought

[17] "العثور على لغة ... تختصر كل شيء، العطور، والأصوات، والألوان"

(A phrase that parallels the underlined portion of the statement Rimbaud made in 1871:

> Cette *langue* sera de l'âme pour l'âme, *résumant tout*, *parfums*, *sons*, *coleurs*, de la pensée accrochant de la pensée et tirant ...)[18]

It is also what Baudelaire demanded when he found it necessary to use a form:

> assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience[19]

[20] (مرن ومتلاطم بحيث يتوافق مع تحركات النفس الغنائية
وتموجات الحلم، وانتفاضات الوجدان)

The revolutionary character of the *poème en prose* and the way Suzanne Bernard has presented it seem to have touched the right chord and fallen into line with the attempts of the *Shi^{c}r Cénacle* to create a new poetics on the *débris* of classical Arabic literary conventions. Of particular appeal to both al-Ḥājj and Adonis is Bernard's identification of the genre's two-fold thrust as

> une force anarchique, destructrice, qui porte

> à nier les formes existantes, et une force organisatrice, qui tend à construire un "tout" poétique; et le terme même de poème en prose souligne cette dualité: qui écrit en prose se révolte contre les conventions metriques et stylistiques; qui écrit un poème vise à créer une forme organisée, fermée sur soi, soustraite au temps.[21]

It is necessary for our study to see how the duality of the poème en prose is reflected in al-Ḥājj's and Adonis' conceptualization of the genre. In both writers, the concept of duality is thus paraphrased:

Adonis[23]

تتضمن قصيدة النثر مبدأً مزدوجاً: الهدم لأنها وليدة التمرد، والبناء لأن كل تمرد ضد القوانين القائمة، مُجبَرٌ بداهةً، إذا أراد أن يبدع أثراً يبقى، أن يعوض عن تلك القوانين بقوانين أخرى كي لا يصل إلى اللاعضوية واللاشكل. فمن خصائص الشعر أن يعرض ذاته فى شكل ما، أن ينظم العالم، إذ يعبر عنه.

(The poème en prose has a two-fold principle: destruction because it [the genre] is the product of rebellion, and construction because any rebellion against existing laws is forced naturally to substitute these laws with new ones lest the durable literature it seeks to create lapse into inorganicness and lack of form, for it is characteristic of poetry

al-Ḥājj[22]

فى كل قصيدة نثر تلتقي معاً دفعة فوضوية هدامة، وقوة تنظيم هندسية. لقد نشأت قصيدة النثر انتفاضاً على الصرامة والقيد.

... ...

ومن الجمع بين الفوضوية لجهة، والتنظيم الفنى لجهة أخرى، من الوحدة بين النقيضين تنفجر ديناميكية قصيدة النثر الخاصة.

(There are two forces that converge in the poème en prose: an anarchic destructive force, and a geometrical organizing force. The poème en prose originated as an insurrection against austerity and bondage.

... ...

From the synthesis of anarchy, on the one hand, and artistic organization, on the other; from the union of the

to present itself in some form, to organize the world, and to formulate an expression of it.)	two opposites bursts forth the special dynamism of the *poème en prose*.)

It is obvious that the two writers follow closely Bernard's text and render the substance of the stated principle into Arabic, but they differ appreciably in their diction as well as in their emphases. Of the two, Adonis would appear to exercise moderation, use factual vocabulary, and set much store by the positive character of the *poème en prose*, and its function according to a new set of laws. Al-Ḥājj, in contrast, uses somewhat provocative vocabulary and places his prime emphasis on the anarchic nature of the genre.

Al-Ḥājj, then, proceeds to argue that the already outlined characteristics do not only help in identifying the new genre, but also in eschewing what is not *poème en prose*. There appear, however, relatively changing characteristics in keeping with the force of evolution. This metamorphosis in the character of the *poème en prose* is an integral part of the vast freedom and unlimited potential the genre provides in the process of creation, and "in its quest of the infinite and the absolute."[24]

In his theorization about the *poème en prose*, al-Ḥājj expresses his aversion against the ready-made forms in this fashion:

> We do not escape from the ready-made to make ready other forms, and we do not deplore the rigid classification to eventually fall into it. All that which we seek is to give the *poème en prose* its due: the distinction of an independent genre.[25]

In as much as there are such literary genres as the novel, the tale, the traditional metrical poem and the "free-verse" form, there is a *poème en prose* and it has equally the right to exist. It is neither desirable nor congruous, in al-Ḥājj's opinion, to put any constraints on the *poème en prose*; it is impossible to fetter the new genre with 'mummified definitions:'

"لا نُريد، ولا يمكن أن نقيد قصيدةَ النثر بتحديدات محنطة." [26]

The new genre, according to al-Ḥājj, is the broadest form the modern poet has arrived at from the viewpoints of theme and technique. It has abandoned whatever falls outside the concerns of the modern poet, and done without appearances as well as the superficial preoccupations which sap the energy of the poem. The *poème en prose*, in keeping with its creative force, has rejected the distractions that turn the poet away from poetry, only to place the poet well before his experience, and hold him responsible for his literary creation. Al-Ḥājj concludes that, in this light, the poet can no longer use the familiar excuses: the rigidity of metre, the domination and tyranny of rhyme. Al-Ḥājj sums up these interrelated features as "القانون الحر لقصيدة النثر"[27] ("the free law of the *poème en prose*").

In this respect, al-Ḥājj hastens to defend the three aspects of the genre, namely, 'brevity,' 'intensity,' and 'gratuity' on the grounds that they are not negative laws intended to disable writers, nor are they ready-made forms in which any trivial material would be poured to make a *poème en prose*; rather, they are the framework for the most fundamental poetic aspect: the poet's talent, his internal experience and his attitude towards the world and humanity. Al-Ḥājj waxes quite poetic in his defence when he adds that "these laws, it would seem to me, stem from the poet's very soul. They are derived from the experience of those who have achieved excellent poèmes en prose. They are, in the last analysis, visions, concomitant elements proper to successful poèmes en prose, not elements invented to guarantee the success of the genre."[28]

Classical Arabic aesthetics has lent itself to many negative interpretations, prominent among which is that it is remote, rigid, and unchangeable. Against this background, al-Ḥājj, much like Adonis before him, tries to establish one of the basic premises about art in general, and poetry in particular. He maintains that there is no finality in poetry ("ليس فى الشعر ما هو نهائى"), and that, insofar as the poet's creation reflects his internal experience, it is impossible to believe that "any circumstances, conditions, laws, or formal principles are eternal."[29] Al-Ḥājj goes on to refute the old maxim that the world does not change. This leads al-Ḥājj to discuss the question of language once more, still inspired by Rimbaud's ideas and phraseology. In view of the changing world, in which the poet lives, he is to seek a new language to render fully his new attitude.

[30]

> لغة جديدة "تختصر كل شىء"، وتسايره فى وثبه الخارق
> الوصف إلى المطلق والمجهول
> ....
> [إن الشاعر] فى حاجة دائمة إلى خلق دائم لها. لغة الشاعر
> تجهل الاستقرار لأن عالمه كتلة حليبية.

> (a new language "résumant tout," and [able] to keep
> up with [the poet] in his extraordinary leap into
> the absolute and the unknown
> ... ...
> [The poet] needs constantly to create his language.

> The language of the poet knows not stability
> because his world is a pioneering block.)

Al-Ḥājj regards the inherited literary tradition as the most dangerous obstacle that impedes the poet's free progress and diverts his direction because the tradition is ready-made and time-honoured, and consequently, all the more able to snare the poet. Al-Ḥājj also singles out for special attention other snares ("حبائل") inherent in the classical Arabic tradition:

(a) the temptation of comfort (" إغراء الراحة "), and

(b) the long-standing authority (" سلطان التراث الطويل "),[31] which have quite a sway on the Arab poet with regard to rhyme, rhythm, and the alluring example of classical poetry. It is necessary, therefore, to make a considerable effort not only for the theoretical rejection of the tradition, but also for the sake of purging the new poetic experience of formal and thematic residues.

Al-Ḥājj offers probably a fresh insight into the concept of "les temps modernes." He sees in it "a divorce from the time of well-being and harmony, and a completion of an endeavour begun a century ago, not for the emancipation of poetry alone, but primarily for the emancipation of the poet."[32]

Al-Ḥājj's "Introduction" begins with the definition of the *poème en prose* as an independent genre quite distinct from the classical conventions of Arabic poetry, and concludes with a few highly rhetorical assertions about the *poème en prose* and its general practitioners. He claims that, if indeed every poet has within himself an inventor of language, then the *poème en prose* is the last language on the ladder of his ambition, as it were. This language, is not definitive, for the poet will invariably continue to invent new languages.[33]

Al-Ḥājj's approach to the genre concludes with a striking, though not untypical, assumption that the poème en prose is the product of the accursed poet and the cancer-ridden era.

[34]

> يجب أن أقول ... إن قصيدة النثر - وهذا إيمان شخصي
> قد يبدو اعتباطيا - عمل شاعر ملعون. الملعون في جسده ووجدانه.
>
> ... ...
>
> قصيدة النثر، التي هي نتاج ملاعين، لا تنحصر بهم، أهميتها أنها
> تتسع لجميع الآخرين ... الجميع يعبرون على ظهر ملعون.
> نحن في زمن السرطان. ... هنا وفي الداخل. والمصابون هم الذين
> خلقوا الشعر الجديد: حين نقول رمبو نشير إلى عائلة من المرضى.
> قصيدة النثر بنت هذه العائلة.
> نحن في زمن السرطان. ... قصيدة النثر خليقة هذا الزمن،
> خليفته، ومصيره.

> (I must say ... that the poème en prose--and this is a personal belief that may sound haphazard--is the work of a cursed poet, cursed in body and in heart.
>
> ... ...
>
> The poème en prose, which is the product of the accursed, is not, however, circumscribed by them; its signification is that it is broad enough to accommodate all others. ... All cross on the back of the cursed poet. We are in the age of cancer ... here and within, and those who are cancer-ridden are they who have created the world of new poetry. When one says "Rimbaud," one points to a family of patients, and the poème en prose is the offspring of this family.
> We are in the age of cancer ... [and] the poème en prose

is the creation of this age, its ally, and its destiny

The frequent reference to Rimbaud both as an inventor of language and form, and as a representative of an ailing family that had created the *poème en prose* confirms our belief that al-Ḥājj somehow identifies himself with Rimbaud. Despite his characteristic objection to both explicit and implicit external influences, al-Ḥājj's use of the phrase "شاعر ملعون" ("poète maudit") and elaboration on it suggest strongly that he is influenced in some form or another also by Verlaine'e concept of the "poètes maudits."[35]

Al-Ḥājj raises in the "Introduction" the central aesthetic questions that have preoccupied the *Shi^{c}r Cénacle* in its formative years (1957-1960). It is to be acknowledged, however, that, of all the members of the *Cénacle*, Adonis stands as the most dynamic and productive figure both at the levels of poetry and literary criticism. His writings on the poetics, old and new, have undoubtedly helped to articulate, in the 1950s and later, the aims and the direction of the *Shi^{c}r* movement. We tend to believe that al-Ḥājj must have found in Adonis timely inspiration and support at least at the first stages of his literary career.

With respect to the *poème en prose* as one of the main achievements of the *Shi^{c}r* movement, Adonis would seem to have provided the Arab reader for the first time with a fairly adequate, if derivative, survey of the theory, technique and salient characteristics of the *poème en prose*. Al-Ḥājj, on the other hand, proceeds from the assumption that the *poème en prose* is an entirely new genre in Arabic literature. Whereas Adonis, in his innovation, is firmly anchored in the native tradition, al-Ḥājj's break with it is absolute.

B

A major force in modern Arabic poetry in the last four decades of this century has been "strangling the swan," to borrow a now famous expression which begins a poem published in 1905 by the Mexican Enrique González Martínez[36]--a poem deciding for the owl of Athene's darkness, unquiet, its eyes boring into the gloom, against the traditional swan, which only shows off its grace, and feels nothing of nature or interior wisdom, a poem which asks that life should be greatly worshipped and that forms and language out of harmony with life should be discarded. "Strangling the swan," or breaking up the antique dealer's mirror-image of the spurious and irrelevant has produced much stylistic discontinuity.

As stressed before, the *Shi^{c}r* generation, in the 1950s, keenly realized the effeteness of the poetic language and suffered the bondage of traditional form. The introduction of the *poème en prose* in 1960 in the pages of the *Shi^{c}r* review marks a radical departure from Arabic literary tradition and ushers in a new, if controversial, phase in modern Arabic poetry.

The question of what provided the decisive impetus for the *poème en prose* in al-Ḥājj in particular and in modern Arabic poetry in general is somewhat complicated by declarations made by al-Ḥājj himself and by Adonis. As noted elsewhere in this study, both writers take great pains to deny that their experimentation with, and introduction of, the *poème en prose* into Arabic literature were occasioned by the French model of the new genre. Adonis tends to view the question of influence in general terms, and consequently "acknowledges his indebtedness to the general movement of poetry and thought in the world."[37] Al-Ḥājj's denial of foreign influence is categorical.

> I had not read any poetry before I wrote Lan. I wrote Lan as a spontaneous outcry both in content and form; I write in a personal manner that had no relation to any external poetic or cultural source.[38]

Nevertheless, the burden of evidence seems to point in the other direction. There are, first of all, other autobiographical revelations by al-Ḥājj, such as his admission of having read Jacques Prévert immediately after high school.[39] There are then his writings which are marked by admiration and doctrinal adherence, on Artaud, Breton, Prévert, and Michaux as well as his translations from these poets. Last but not least, there is the nature of his poetry which is the best testimony. All these facts bear abundant evidence of the strong French influence on him.

The two writers' rejection of specific foreign influences as a major factor in the introduction of the poème en prose in Arabic is parallelled by their assertion that the genre originated in the Ṣūfī writings. We feel that this two-fold attitude has to be taken, especially at the early phases of the genre, in the context of an apologia which stresses the continuity of an Arabic cultural and literary tradition instead of a politically and culturally unpalatable influence.

We will have also to ask ourselves the legitimate general question whether or not the poème en prose is a native genre in Arabic literature. Opinions are quite divided on the question. Those who answer in the affirmative, trace the ancestry of the genre to early literary forms such as *saj*^{c} ("rhymed prose") and accordingly to the poetic prose of the Qur'ān which is marked by a fairly consistent rhyme, especially in the short *sūras*, the *saj*^{c} of the *maqāmas*, and the poetic prose used in the translation of western poetry. All such examples are adduced either as precursory forms of, or preparatory phases for, the *poème en prose*.

Some, among the avant-gardists, who either by conviction or by their tactical willingness to appease the conservatives and ward off their accusations, tended to relate the *poème en prose* to a native Arabic matrix. In this context, the most important statements were made by Adonis, Yūsuf al-Khāl and al-Ḥājj.

Adonis wrote the first essay on the *poème en prose* in 1960, and argued among other things that the genre existed in Arabic literature, especially in the prose writings of the *Ṣūfīs* (Muslim mystics). To place Adonis' argument in the proper perspective, it should be borne in mind that Adonis launched his essay in defence of the new genre against background of the not untypical claims that the *poème en prose* was anti-Arabic, and, as such, it was detrimental to the Arabic poetic tradition.

The climate in 1960 may be said to have prompted Adonis to invoke the classical heritage and establish some cautionary linkage between the new genre and Arabic literature. It is certain, however, that Adonis did not ingratiate himself with the conservatives at the expense of his literary integrity and place as an historian and theoretician of Arabic poetics. To illustrate Adonis' unequivocal position on the genre, the following passage, published in 1974, will have to be quoted in full.

> What I had struggled to establish was not that this form of expression was a European import, as we were accused, but to link it directly with Arabic *Ṣūfī* writings. Today, I am more convinced of [the soundness] of my earlier position, even though it was not clear enough at the time. I can now defend it in its entirety on the ground that this species of writing was known in Arabic literature; it had been known in Arabic literature before any foreign literature without exception because Arabic literature is older than known European literatures.[40]

Adonis' unflagging efforts to revive *Ṣūfī* literature and harness it to *avant-garde* poetry have registered on the direction of Arabic poetry and the literary harvest of the late 1960s and 1970s with emphatic force.

Yūsuf al-Khāl's position on this question is somewhat qualified. He maintains that this form existed in all literatures, but was never theorized, articulated and practised as a literary genre outside French literature.[41]

Al-Ḥājj is evidently self-contradictory, for whereas he follows Adonis' argument that the *poème en prose* has its native beginnings in Arabic literature and that the *Ṣūfī* prose writings provide the best examples of it, he emphasizes that the genre is "the product of those who are afflicted with sickness and madness; the product of the 'poètes maudits'":

> [42] قصيدة النثر... عمل شاعر ملعون. الملعون فى
> جسده ووجدانه.

Furthermore, al-Ḥājj associates the poème en prose, not with Arabic literature and the Ṣūfī prosaists, but with French literature and more specifically with the undisputed technicians of the genre: Baudelaire and Rimbaud.[43]

Any flaws in al-Ḥājj's early thinking about the poème en prose are quite understandable when examined against available data of his biography. Al-Ḥājj's first volume was published in 1960 when he was barely twenty-three,[44] equipped only with high school education and a few years of journalistic experience. It is not too presumptuous to assume that al-Ḥājj, at this impressionable age, would subscribe to Adonis' premises on the genre with little or no reservation as the latter was already an accomplished poet, critic and formidable force in Syro-Lebanese letters. Al-Ḥājj at best was guided in his formulations on the genre more by his talent as a creative poet-rebel than by formal knowledge of literary theory, let alone the prose writings of the Ṣūfīs. Whereas al-Ḥājj evinces a measure of competence in his writings about, and translations from, the French Surrealists and practitioners of the poème en prose, his familiarity with the Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī literature is, by his own admission, non-existent:

> I am not well versed in the Ṣūfist lore, and if you ask me to name a Ṣūfist poet I would barely mention one.[45]

The contribution of the Ṣūfī writings to the genesis of the poème en prose in the early 1960s is of little consequence, if at all. Adonis, as stated earlier, tries merely to confirm the existence of this form of expression in Ṣūfī literature, but no where does he claim that Ṣūfī literature gave rise to the new genre. There is ample evidence, however, to suggest that the Ṣūfī factor comes into play at a later stage in the development of the genre, when Adonis launches his 'cultural review' Mawākif in 1968. In a four-part essay, Adonis calls for a new style of writing, and advances the style of the tenth-century Ṣūfī, Naffarī, as an 'old' example for a 'new' writing.[46] Adonis notes that the astonishing characteristic of Naffarī's writing is his form of expression and that, at the time of the supremacy of classical formalism, Naffarī was trying to establish another principle for another form.[47] To underscore Naffarī's relevance to the experiment of the poème en prose and new poetry as a whole, Adonis sheds further light on Naffarī's style.

[48]
ليس الشكل عند النّفري صيغة كتابة ، وإنما هو صيغة وجود.
أعني أنه وعد ببداية دائمة . ومن هنا لا ينطلق النفري من
أولانية شكلية ، بل ينطلق على العكس من أولانية اللاشكل.
كتابة النفري تصدر، ضمن التراث العربي، عن أصالة
شخصية مطلقة ... لا أثر فيها لأي نموذج سابق، ولا أثر
فيها للذاكرة الجمالية .

> (Naffarī's form is not a version of writing; rather, it is a version of existence; that is to say, it is a promise of a permanent beginning. Therefore, Naffarī's writing emanates, while still within Arabic tradition, from absolute personal originality, free of all traces of prior models and aesthetic memory.)

Both from the technical and thematic viewpoints, Naffarī means for the Shiʿr and Mawākif generations far more than a chance discovery.[49] His literary paradigm synthesizes rejection of ready-made forms, exploratton of the unknown, absolute originality and metaphysical sensibility--

cherished ideals new Arab poets have set out to accomplish.[50]

It has been our purpose in this study to emphasize that what in fact matters is not that the *poème en prose* is not predated by viable examples from *Ṣūfī* literature--as these have existed for centuries in Arabic and Islamic literature without giving rise to an independent literary genre--but that the introduction of the new genre occurred in the 1950s, as a consequence of two inter-related factors: (a) the inadequacy of the classical *qaṣīda* to render the spirit and concerns of the modern age, and (b) the external stimulus of the *poème en prose* as a *bone fide* genre in contemporary French poetry.

FOOTNOTES

[1] "Prose Poem (poem in prose)," Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, enlarged ed. (Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 664.

[2] The tenor of this section on al-Ḥājj's conception of the poème en prose in particular, and his poetics in general, is largely inspired by al-Ḥājj's formulations in the "مقدمة" ("Introduction") to his first volume of poetry, Lan (Beirut, 1960), pp. 5-15. References will be made henceforth to "Introduction."

[3] "Introduction," p. 10.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. See Suzanne Bernard, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, 1959), p. 514.

[6] Ibid., p. 11.

[7] Though never the mainstream in modern Arabic poetry, this technique was unevenly adopted by Arab poets between the 1950s and 1960s, and was dubbed the "Free Verse Movement." In spite of its limited success in relaxing the austerity of classical prosody, it may well be seen in retrospect as an extension of, or variation on, the classical metric technique, not as an emancipation from it.

[8] Al-Ḥājj acknowledges his debt to Suzanne Bernard's book as follows:

إني أستعير بتلخيص كلّي [تحديد ماهية قصيدة النثر] من أحدث كتاب
في هذا الموضوع بعنوان " قصيدة النثر من بودلير إلى أيامنا " للكاتبة
الفرنسية سوزان برنار.

(I borrow, in a general synoptic way, [the definition of the poème en prose] from the most recent book on the subject by the French writer, Suzanne Bernard), "Introduction," pp. 11-12. Adonis appends this footnote to his essay on the poème en prose:

" اعتمدت فى كتابة هذه الدراسة ، بشكل خاص ، على هذا الكتاب ... "

("I especially have depended in the writing of this study ..."), then he quotes the book and all bibliographical particulars in French. See Adonis, " فى قصيدة النثر ," Shi^{c}r, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 75-83.

[9] "Introduction," p. 12. Al-Ḥājj renders closely, in this quotation, a segment of Poe's "The Poetic Principle," namely, "a 'long poem' is simply a flat contradiction." See E.A. Poe, Literary Criticism of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Robert L. Hough (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), p. 33. On grounds of textual evidence as well as al-Ḥājj's limited knowledge of English, we are led to believe that he did not check Poe's "The Poetic Principle" in English or even in French, but relied exclusively on Bernard. See Le Poème en prose, p. 439.

[10] Le Poème en prose, p. 763.

[11] "Introduction," p. 12.

[12] Adonis, " فى قصيدة النثر ," Shi^{c}r, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 81-82.

[13] Le Poème en prose, pp. 408-465, 763-773.

[14] Ibid., pp. 220-246.

[15] Lan, pp. 77-104.

[16] Al-Rasūla bi-Sha^{c}riha al-Ṭawīl ḥatta al-Yanābī^{c} (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār li al-Nashr, 1975). The poem fills eighty-eight pages.

[17] Lan, p. 12.

[18] Rimbaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Roland de Renéville and J. Mouquet, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 270.

[19] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968), p. 146.

[20] "Introduction," p. 12. The Arabic translation of Baudelaire's description of the *poème en prose* is al-Ḥājj's.

[21] *Le Poème en prose*, p. 444.

[22] "Introduction," pp. 12-13.

[23] Adonis, "في قصيدة النثر," *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 78.

[24] "Introduction," p. 13.

[25] *Ibid*.

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] *Ibid*.

[28] *Ibid*., pp. 13-14.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 14.

[30] *Ibid*.

[31] *Ibid*.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 15.

[33] This recurrent idea of the continuous invention of poetic languages and forms owes much, in our opinion, to Adonis' essay, published in *Shi^{c}r*

in 1959: " محاولة فى تعريف الشعر الحديث " ("Towards the Definition of Modern [Arabic] Poetry"), in which Adonis discusses the question of artistic creation in general, and the kind of poetry the *Shi^{c}r* generation set out to achieve. See *Shi^{c}r*, III, 11 (Summer 1959), 79-94 and Adonis' book, *Zaman al-Shi^{c}r* (Beirut: Dār al-^{c}Awda, 1972), pp. 8-27. The same essay is revised in this book and given the new title " الكشف عن عالم يظل فى حاجة الى الكشف " ("Exploring a World that Remains in Need of Exploration") admittedly after René Char.

[34] "Introduction," p. 15.

[35] Verlaine, *Les Poètes maudits* (Paris, 1884). See also Verlaine, *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, ed. Jacques Borel, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade ([Paris]: Gallimard, [1972]).

[36] Samuel Beckett, trans., *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* (Indiana University Press, 1958), pp. 160-161.

[37] "Interview with Adonis," (Beirut, October 2, 1974). See also Adonis, "Saint John Perse wa Anā," *Mawākif*, VII, 29 (Autumn 1974), 164-165.

[38] "Interview with al-Ḥājj," (Beirut, October 3, 1974).

[39] Al-Ḥājj, "Fi Ghurfat Jacques Prévert," *Shi^{c}r*, IX, 35 (Summer 1967), 59. See also al-Ḥājj, in collaboration with F. Ṭrābulsī, "Jacques Prévert: Mukhtārāt Shi^{c}ṛiyya," *Shi^{c}r*, III, 9 (Winter 1959), 67-85.

[40] "Interview with Adonis."

[41] "Interview with al-Khāl," (Beirut, October 1, 1974).

[42] "Introduction," *Lan*, p. 15.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 6.

[44] See [al-Khāl's] promotional note on the back cover of *Lan*. See also on al-Khāl's authorship of the note, *Shi^{c}r*, VIII, 26 (Spring 1963), 138.

[45] "Interview with al-Ḥajj."

[46] Adonis, "Ta'sīs Kitāba Jadīda III," *Mawākif*, III, 17-18 (November - December 1971), 6-10.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[48] *Ibid*., pp. 2, 10.

[49] Adonis came across Naffarī's *Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt* in 1965 by sheer accident in the library of the American University in Beirut. See on this point, *Mawākif*, III, 17-18 (November - December 1971), 6. Please note that the proper spelling is *Mawāqif* (Arabic for 'positions'); however, Adonis uses, on the back of his cultural review, the spelling of *Mawākif*. Wherever reference is made to Adonis' review, we shall adopt his spelling.

[50] Adonis made in 1960 the observation that, with the exception of the *Ṣūfī* poetry and a few poems of Abu'l l-^{c}Alā', classical Arabic poetry lacks the 'metaphysical sensibility,' which he regarded as the principal characteristic of modern Arabic poetry. See on this point *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 16 (Autumn 1960), 15. See also on the concept of poetry and form-content controversy, Adonis, *Muqaddima li al-Shi^{c}r al-^{c}Arabī* (Beirut: Dār al-^{c}Awda, 1971), pp. 11, 8-27, and *Zaman al-Shi^{c}r* (Beirut: Dār al-^{c}Awda, 1972), pp. 282-284.

V

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF AL-ḤĀJJ AND THE *POÈME EN PROSE*

'Unsī al-Ḥājj is a colorful, multi-faceted figure that combines an intriguing personality with a controversial literary career. Apart from, or probably in conjunction with, these considerations, our academic interest in him is oriented towards his rôle as a literary emissary leaving aside at this point whether or not he has played this rôle consciously. Furthermore, it was al-Ḥājj who rehabilitated and reintroduced Surrealism into modern Arabic literature, and, in a fairly consistent way, urged Arab fellow-writers and readers alike to avail themselves of the French Surrealist experience and its representatives Breton, Prévert, Artaud and Michaux.

The character of al-Ḥājj's poetic experiment marks the extreme, if by no means the ultimate phase in the development of modern Arabic poetry. Notwithstanding the valuable and original contribution of such avant-garde fellow-writers as Adonis (ᶜAlī Aḥmad Saᶜīd), who was practically the first to broach, champion and write on the poème en prose as a sui generis literary genre,[1] it is safe to claim that al-Ḥājj has specialized in the articulation of the poème en prose at the two levels of theory and praxis.

Whereas his contemporaries underwent the different stages of poetic development, that is to say, that they tried their hand at the traditional form of the qaṣīda, the stanzaic or strophic form, the tafᶜīla verse known otherwise as "The Free Verse Movement,"[2] and combined any of these forms with the poème en prose, al-Ḥājj has written all his poetry (four volumes up to 1974) exclusively in the poème en prose form. No evidence is available to verify al-Ḥājj's experimentation with conventional or post-conventional poetic forms.

His first collection Lan ("Not"), published in 1960, took the Arab literary circles by surprise for a variety of reasons:

1. Both in the Introduction and the poems, al-Ḥājj expresses squarely his wild rebellion against all traditional literary and socio-cultural norms. He incites individual and mass 'insanity' and makes no bones about advocating the destruction of the established order so as to permit the new and young literary attempts to breathe and survive.

[3] بين القارئ الرجعي والشاعر الرجعي حلف مصيري ...
لدى هذا التشبث بالتراث "الرسمي" ... هل يمكن محاولة أدبية أن
تتنفس ؟ إنني أجيب : كلا. إن أمام هذه المحاولة إمكانين ؛ فإما الاختناق
أو الجنون. بالجنون ينتصر المتمرد ، ويفسح المجال لصوته كي يُسمَع. ينبغي أن يقف في
الشارع ، ويشتم بصوت عالٍ ، يلعن وينبح. هذه البلاد ، وكل بلاد متعصبة
لرجعيتها وجهلها ، لا تقاوم إلا بالجنون حتى تنقض كل محاولة انتفاضية في وجه الزبد
يقاتلونها بأسلحة سياسية وعنصرية ومذهبية ... لا تجدي غير الصراحة المطلقة
ونهب المسافات ، والتغزيل المحموم ، والهستيرة المستميتة. على المحاولين ليجبوا الألف
عام [sic] الهدم ، الهدم ، الهدم ، إثارة الفضيحة ، والغضب ، والحقد. ...
أول الواجبات التدمير. الخلود الشعري الصافي سيتعطل أمره في هذا الجو العاصف ...
التخريب حيوي ومقدس.

> (There is an alliance of destiny between the reactionary reader and the reactionary poet. ... In the face of this tenacious clinging to the 'official' legacy ... is it possible for a fresh literary attempt to breathe? I answer: NO. There are two possibilities before this attempt: either suffocation or madness. Through madness, the rebel triumphs and expands the scope for his voice to be heard. He should stand in the street and revile

> [society] loudly, he should curse society and propagage [his views]. This country, and all countries wedded to their retrogression [" رجعيتها "] and ignorance can only be resisted by madness in order for any rebellious attempt to confront those who fight it with political, racial and ideological weapons. Nothing would help save absolute candour, tearing down the distances, feverish repudiation [" التعزيل المحموم "] and desperate hysterical violence [" الهسترة "]. It behooves the experimentalists, in order to eradicate one thousand years, [to take to] destruction, and destruction, and destruction, and the stirring up of disgrace, wrath and hate. ... The primary duty is destruction. Pure and poetic creation will be impaired in this stormy atmosphere. ... Destruction is [both] sacred and essential to life.)

2. The collection in its entirety is written in the poème en prose form. Al-Ḥājj does this in absolute defiance to popular sensibility. He cares little or not at all as to how his poetry is received; what matters in fact is that he expresses himself. As for his audience, he asserts:

4 " أعتلي مكبّر الصوت لأن جماهيري أعرفها، مؤمن بها، أحتقرها. "

> ("I ride the microphone as I know my [reading] masses; [while] I believe in them, I despise them.")

From the standpoint of the majority, as shall be discussed below, Lan figures as either no poetry or 'anti-poetry' as it were, yet al-Ḥājj makes no effort to ingratiate himself with the public, or make up for what seems to be a 'deficiency' from its perspective.

3. While using the Arabic script, the collection shows little affinity to the mainstream of Arabic poetry and/or to the standard Arabic language. The alienation in al-Ḥājj's poetry is readily evident in his unorthodox diction, grammar, syntax and sentence structure. Additionally, his unfamiliar Surrealist temperament and the bewildering obscurity and at times ambiguity have placed him and his experiment at several removes from the official sensibility of 1960s and 1970s.

The historical pattern of the critical reception of al-Ḥājj's poetry has been manifestly irregular. As a member of the Editorial Board of the Shi^{c}r review and Cénacle, he was one of the foci of controversy, and consequently enjoyed a considerable reputation on the pages of Shi^{c}r and its sibling Adab as well as the literary circles within and outside the Lebanon. Part of this reputation was deservedly an acknowledgement of his talent and his unwavering efforts in propagating and establishing the poème en prose as a respectable and independent literary genre.

The disappearance of Shi^{c}r in the mid-1970s may be said to have resulted in the waning of his reputation and the interruption, if not the cessation, of his poetic output, even though he is still the Editor of al-Nahār's literary supplement. Part of the lapse is caused (a) by a general decline of interest in the already aging and sterile 'Free Verse Movement,' of which the poème en prose is regarded as an offshoot, and (b) by the fact that his first collection of poems, Lan, was arguably his tour de force, after which he either continued to imitate, or failed to excel, himself. His subsequent collections are a testimony, however, to his ability to write unevenly good poetry. Al-Ḥājj's success as a journalist, albeit a literary journalist, also tends to divert attention from his poetic talent. His recent partisan embroilment in the on-going Lebanese Civil War may well be another factor.

The Importance of Being 'Unsī al-Ḥājj

A. Al-Ḥājj, the Introducer of the *Poème en prose* as a Literary Genre.

Against the literary climate in the 1950s and 1960s which was characterized by the steadily growing protestation against the even limited innovation in the Arabic *qaṣīda* and classical metrics as manifested in the so-called 'Free Verse Movement.' Against this climate, al-Ḥājj introduces and writes exclusively in the more daring (by Arabic standards) *poème en prose*. Between 1960 and 1970, he published four volumes of *poèmes en prose*, and established himself as a highly famous or infamous avant-gardist although the hue and cry against him and his experimentation with the genre has never died down in conservative and/or reactionary quarters.

It may be said that 'The Free Verse Movement' has paved the way for the emergence of the *poème en prose*, but this assumption is contested on the grounds that:

1. 'The Free Verse Movement' has never freed itself fully from the rigid conventions of the Arabic *qaṣīda* and prosody. On close examination, this movement has functioned all along within the framework of the classical tradition.

2. Al-Ḥājj began writing his *poèmes en prose* in the Beirut monthly review, *al-Adīb*, whose French-educated Editor, Albert Adīb, himself a writer of Symbolist prose poetry, opened its pages in the early 1950s

for the talented young poets and encouraged them both to read the French poets and write Symbolist prose poetry.

Although we do not have access to any of al-Ḥājj's early poems such as published in al-Adīb, his published books invite the assumption that in order to arrive at his present command of his tools and literary genre, he must have used al-Adīb, among other things, as his training and/or his experimenting ground. Al-Adīb undoubtedly represents an important phase of al-Ḥājj's apprenticeship in letters and exposure to French influence.[5]

B. Al-Ḥājj, a writer sui generis of the Poème en prose.

As noted earlier, al-Ḥājj has made the poème en prose his exclusive literary genre and medium of expression. He states that he does not write in any other genre, does not write about his poetry and does not publish any works of literary criticism as he would rather reach his readers only via his poetry, free of all obstacles.[6]

C. The Reception of al-Ḥājj in the Arab World.

Phase I

The relation between al-Ḥājj and the Shiʿr review was initially quite enigmatic. Paradoxically, al-Ḥājj was recognized by the review not as a poet, but as a literary critic reviewing recent publications in modern Arabic poetry. With the exception of one almost fortuitous case, that is the insertion of his 'Three Poems' in the issue of January, 1958,[7] nothing other than his book reviews was published until the Spring issue of 1960.[8] Al-Ḥājj, however, became a permanent feature thereafter in various capacities: poet, critic, translator, publicist of Surrealism and a prominent member of the Editorial Board of *Shi^{c}r* and its *Cénacle*.

No public statements have ever been made about the hiatus between 1958 - 1960. Our personal interviews with the three central figures of the *Shi^{c}r* movement: Adonis, al-Khāl and al-Ḥājj will help to unravel the mystery for the first time. With regard to the literary genre under consideration and to the backstage performance, this episode in the history of the *Shi^{c}r* movement is indeed worth telling. The versions given by the three writers seem to complement one another and provide a well-balanced picture.

Adonis refers to al-Khāl's negative attitude towards the *poème en prose* and consequently his refusal to publish any of al-Ḥājj's poems. I shall quote below the relevant portion of his statement:

> I was at the time reading the writings of the *Ṣūfists* [Muslim Mystics], especially those by Naffarī and Abū-Ḥayyān and came to realize that their [prose] writings were more valuable and more poetic than [regular] verse. ... Because of this motive, I used to encourage all the new writings to break away from prosody. Al-Ḥājj was at the time writing 'simple' and elementary pieces, and in order to establish this trend I tried my utmost to have him published. I was then confronted by the strong objection of al-Khāl [*Shi^{c}r*'s Editor-in-Chief], but I was at length able to convince him, and consequently al-Ḥājj was published. Furthermore, I wrote myself "Arwād, Yā Amīrat-al-Wahm" ("أرْوَادُ ، يا أميرةَ الوهم") ('Arwād, O Princess of Illusion') which was the first *poème en prose* ever written in Arabic and served as a prelude to al-Ḥājj and al-Māghūṭ, after whom the *poème en prose* became widespread and gained universal recognition.[9]

Al-Ḥājj acknowledges obliquely Adonis' efforts and adds that although al-Khāl and several others struck an attitude of unqualified rejection towards the genre and al-Ḥājj's poems in Lan, they eventually accepted this literary form and wrote their poetry in it.[10]

While al-Khāl keeps silent on his allegedly negative attitude, he addressed himself to the genre from the historical perspective and its place in Shiᶜr's innovative efforts. In comparison with the poetry of Jabrā, Ṣāyigh and al-Māghūṭ, which is intentionally lineated and rhythmic, he regards al-Ḥājj's poetry as the closest to the French model of poème en prose.[11]

In view of Shiᶜr's history and its contents, it is not very easy to rationalize al-Khāl's early reticence towards this literary genre and its practitioners. From the very outset, Shiᶜr paid special attention to the poème en prose and the variations on it. The first issues of the review featured contributions varying from 'free' verse and poetic prose by Albert Adīb, Thurayyā Malḥas, Jabrā I. Jabrā to prose translations from Jiménez' prose poem Platero y yo ('Platero and I').[12]

It is at least arguable that al-Khāl's seniority, Anglo-American educational background together with his position as the Editor-in-Chief and his public responsibility as the leader of the movement must have put certain limitations on his freedom of movement and made him look like the conservative in the group.[13]

Phase II

With the publication of Lan in 1960, al-Ḥājj and, by extension, the poème en prose as an independent literary genre, move from the relatively small and private circle of Shiᶜr to the general readership inside and outside the Lebanon. Al-Khāl rises to the occasion and writes an enthusiastic blurb identifying the character of the experiment and its place in Arabic and international literature.

14

تخطو مجموعة لن ، لأنسى الحاج بالشعر العربى خطوة جريئة نحو الحد الفاصل بين القديم والحديث. الكلمة العربية تتفجر فى هذه المجموعة بطاقات جديدة لم تألفها من قبل ، وأسلوب التعبير يتخذ منحًى جديدًا يقع فى خط الشعر الطليعى المعاصر فى العالم. أما المضمون ، ففيه من التجربة الشخصية والصدق ما يجعله معبِّرًا عن الجيل الطالع أجمل تعبير.

فى هذه الباكورة الشعرية ، يبدأ أنسى الحاج اتجاهًا فريدًا فى الشعر العربى. وفيها يقف على رأس جيل شعرى متمرد ، متطلع إلى البناء الفريد الشامخ على أنقاض المبتذل والمسبوق والعاجز فى تراثنا العربى والحضارى.

ولد أنسى الحاج فى بيروت منذ ثلاث وعشرين سنة، وهو يشتغل فى الصحافة الأدبية ، ويشترك فى خميس مجلة شعر ، وهيئة تحريرها.

(Al-Ḥājj's volume, Lan, has pushed Arabic poetry audaciously to the demarcation line between the old and the new. The Arabic word in the collection bursts with new energies never before known in Arabic, and the style of expression follows a new direction that has its place in contemporary international avant-garde poetry. As for its content, personal experience and sincerity qualify the collection as the best expression of the rising generation.
In this first poetic work of his, al-Ḥājj blazes the

> trail in Arabic poetry where he stands in the forefront of a rebellious poetic generation aspiring to a lofty unique construction on the ruins of the banal, the outmoded and the impotent both in our Arabic literature and civilization.
> 'Unsī al-Ḥājj was born in Beirut twenty-three years ago. He makes his living as a literary journalist, and participates in the Thursday meetings of the *Shi^{c}r* review and its Editorial Board.)

Literary *avant-garde* movements in Third World countries are often denuded of their aesthetic layers and reduced to either one of two polarities: pro- or anti- nationalist sentiment. One of the very influential literary organs which is so oriented is the Beirut-based monthly review, *al-Ādāb*. *Al-Ādāb* has adopted, since its inception in the early 1950s, a version of Sartre's *engagement* ('*Iltizām*'), and championed the nationalist cause under the banner of pan-Arabism. Al-Ḥājj's advocacy of the *poème en prose* and his uncompromising indictment of Arabic effete conventions were in all likelihood bound to incur the wrath of Arab conservatives and nationalists alike.

Under the heading " لُبْنانُنا " ('Our Lebanon') *al-Ādāb* assails 'a series of conspiracies,' allegedly aimed at balkanizing the region and derailing the Lebanon from its pan-Arabist path, and singles out indirectly the *Shi^{c}r* group and al-Ḥājj:

> It is necessary to point out here that these conspiracies operated in many fields and that we took it upon ourselves more than once in this review to expose them in the cultural realm where these [conspiracies] flourished in the hands of a group whose principal objective was to destroy Arabic legacy, to spread chaos, to disseminate 'rejectionism' (" الرّفض ") and to adopt extremism as well as madness

The publication of Lan in 1960 generated a telling debate that was to continue well into the seventies on the pages of the Shi^{c}r review as well as other literary periodicals. The debate in essence reflects diverse approaches and attitudes towards al-Ḥājj and the genre he consistently uses in his collection.

The opening discussion centres on the manner of expression in Lan and although there was a unanimity of opinion that al-Ḥājj's manner of expression ushered in a new style, the question was raised as to whether or not the Arabic language would accommodate this style. It was contended that Arabic was not familiar with this genre. The poème en prose, in general, tends to be personal, and it is more so in al-Ḥājj. Is it possible in this light to provide keys to this genre to make it more accessible to the general readership, or are the responsiveness to, and appreciation of, the genre merely personal or private? With regard to the underlying philosophy in this collection, the observation is made that rejectionism is the most pronounced characteristic that distinguishes this book of poems. Does the poet stop there, i.e., at the level of rejectionism, or does he try to suggest an alternative to the world he rejects? Yūsuf al-Khāl, the Editor of Shi^{c}r, in his attempt to sum up the debate, concludes that absolute rejection and existence are mutually exclusive. Accordingly, Lan has the two facets of rejection and acceptance side by side, and therein lies the contradiction of the modern character.

Al-Khāl attributes the obscurity of Lan to the subconscious that can simultaneously see the vision and afford insight. This probably accounts for the fact that when the poet expresses visions, hallucinations often prevails because of the chaos within himself on the one hand, and the density and paradoxes in his subconscious, on the other.[19] As for Arabic as a modern living language, it cannot but accommodate all enriching attempts however daring and odd.

Khālida Sa^{c}īd sets a pioneering example of both objective and sympathetic criticism of the experimentalism in *Lan*, a collection that has been long maligned by partisan views and shoddy journalism. In her review of the early poetry of al-Ḥājj, Khālida Sa^{c}īd identifies his salient characteristics and relates him indirectly to the French literary tradition, especially that of the Dadaists and Surrealists. Her approach to al-Ḥājj is predominantly psycho-analytic.

Khālida Sa^{c}īd argues that al-Ḥājj does not seek from the Introduction to *Lan* to set forth a new poetics of his own, or explain the principles according to which he writes his poetry. Neither is he interested in constructing a new world on the *débris* of the existing one. Apart from his defense of the *poème en prose*, the Introduction can be reduced to one basic principle, namely, freedom. His writing is inspired by the objective chance ("يُكتَبُ الشِّعرُ بالصدفة").[20] Like the Dadaists and early Surrealists, al-Ḥājj has no ultimate aim from creation save emancipation.

Al-Ḥājj's poetry is best characterized by a critical struggle between revelation and camouflage, between language and non-language. His poem appears to be more of a torture than of emancipation. It is in Paul Ricoeur's words, "a project of self-destruction."[21] The struggle between language and non-language is violent because language and non-language are of equal strength. This is probably what charges his poetry with impetuosity, fragmentation and tension. Khālida terms this aspect as 'stammering' (" لعثمة ").[22] While this 'stammering' concealed his poetry from the majority of his readers who have been traditionally accustomed to the patterned, capsulated, self-explanatory thought, it gave him in their eyes a special attraction.

Khālida Sa^{c}īd interprets the struggle between language and non-language in Freudian terms, and sees it as a struggle between eros and thanatos. While eros drives him towards the other, thanatos freezes his movement and confines him to silence. The movement towards the other means establishing contact with him/her, and that, in turn, means death and, consequently, non-language.

She then identifies al-Ḥājj's major problem as " التّواصُل " ('al-tawāṣul'), i.e., establishing contact with the other.[23] It is evident that contacting the other remains in Lan like a dream, or a tenuous or almost impossible hope, and that the poet is condemned to self-confinement and to impotent language. In a gloss on Freud, Paul Ricoeur states that eros is enlivened by the animation of thanatos.[24] These considerations are perhaps what makes al-Ḥājj's poetry in Lan look like a stage for the struggle between life and death. Al-Ḥājj, in her opinion, telescopes the struggle in a line like this:

"أُرخيتنى، ياقشة البحر الوحيدة، لم ترخينى."[25]

("You let go of me, you solitary sea-straw,
you haven't let go of me.")

The torment resulting from this on-going struggle accounts for al-Ḥājj's oscillation between introspection and the invocation of his subconscious residues, on the one hand, and his exhaustive use of all the linguistic potential of negation and destruction, on the other. As a consequence of all this, his diction throughout *Lan* is stripped of all rhetorics and decorations.

Khālida Sa^{c}īd discovers some similarity between al-Ḥājj and the Surrealists when she notes that in his feverish resistance against *thanatos*, al-Ḥājj resigns himself to the current of auto-reproductive words, and this is where his poetry would appear very close to hallucination or automatic writing.[26]

In another study of "The Early Indications of Rejectionism in Modern Arabic Poetry" ("بوادر الرفض في الشعر العربي الحديث")[27] where Khālida Sa^{c}īd deals with one of the major characteristics of the *Shi^{c}r* movement, she identifies four categories of the phenomenon of rejection:

i. Negative rejectionism that manifests itself in resignation;

ii. Positive rejectionism that tends to destroy in order to build anew;

iii. Defiant rejectionism that disowns the world but stays in it; and

iv. Nihilist rejectionism which neither hopes, nor resigns, nor looks for a solution.

She contends that al-Ḥājj is the only poet whose poetry falls under this fourth category.[28] Al-Ḥājj, she says, "hoists the banner of negation."[29] He prints the word '*Lan*' ('Not/Never') on the cover of the first collection to negate the future in particular, since to him future implies hope. As a consequence of this temperamental orientation, al-Ḥājj turned his back to the world and chose the exile within his body. Like al-Ḥājj, the other rejectionist poets reject the world, but, unlike him, they reject it, confront it and remain in it. Al-Ḥājj's rebellion is not only against the world without, but also against himself, his body and his blood. He says about himself:

"مرة ثانية لا تُخْلَقْ، ومعك هذا الدم."[30]

("Don't be created again with this blood in your veins")

Khālida Sa^{c}īd, in her study of rejectionism, hastens to correct her earlier formulation on al-Ḥājj. In her review of Lan, she asserts that al-Ḥājj's poetry does not aim at building a new world on the ruins of the existing one, and that the process of creation in al-Ḥājj has no ultimate purpose. She draws, however, the opposite conclusion in her study of rejectionism by quoting Nietzsche's "One of the fundamental conditions for confirmation is negation and destruction." She also quotes a French historian of Dada as stating that the Dadaists' aim from rejection and destruction is to replace the submission to the status quo by the creation of a loftier reality.[31]

In a similar vein, Nihād Khayyāṭa approaches al-Ḥājj from three different angles: the rebel, the theoretician of the poème en prose, and the poet in Lan. He regards al-Ḥājj as a first rate writer who devises for himself an unprecedented style of writing all his own. Because of his absolute rejection of the familiar and the commonplace, al-Ḥājj seeks a language that does not exist in the Arabic lexicon: he coins his own vocabulary.[32]

His theorization of the genre in the Introduction to Lan testifies to his sound understanding and broad knowledge of his subject matter. Al-Ḥājj introduces three genres: " قصيدة النثر " ('*poème en prose*'), " النثر الشعري " ("poetic prose") and " الشعر المنثور " ("prosified or prose poetry"). He does not, however, define the latter two, nor does he distinguish them from the *poème en prose*. Despite this reservation, Khayyāṭa makes the assertion that al-Ḥājj has succeeded in presenting the genre as a self-sufficient and intellectual structure.[33] In view of the fact that al-Ḥājj's poetry is distinct, an appreciation of it cannot be arrived at through the application of such criteria as were applied to al-Mutanabbī, Abū-Tammām and Abū-Rīsha, nor can it be arrived at through the scholastic method of analysis.

In Khayyāṭa's opinion, the poetry in *Lan* "resembles a contest in cross-thought puzzles (not cross-word puzzles). Al-Ḥājj's poetry leaves vestiges that penetrate the subconscious of the readers without their being aware of it."[34] Khayyāṭa goes on to draw an interesting, if not quite accurate, parallel between the effect of the *poème en prose* on the reader and the effect on the listener of a song in a foreign language he does not know. If he listens intently to it, he will miss the point, but if he busies himself with other things, the nature of the emanating music may well transport him to the atmosphere the meaning builds up.[35] The critic then poses the question as to whether or not al-Ḥājj has succeeded in conveying his experience. If the answer is negative, what then is the value of al-Ḥājj's poetic output?

In *Lan* all is turned topsy-turvy: the sacred becomes vile and the good evil. Al-Ḥājj rebels against all values, and, in order to destroy them, he posits them in contexts that inspire nausea, loathing and disgust as is evident in his poem, " نشيد البلاد " ("National Anthem"). Al-Ḥājj calls for the destruction of values not to gratify a hysterical desire, but because their foundation has collapsed. In his poem " حالة حصار " ("State of Siege"), he urges the destruction of these values because of his belief that they limit man's exercise of his humanity and inhibit his internal growth. Nihād Khayyāṭa relates al-Ḥājj's poetry to its socio-political matrix:

> If the modern man is, as Lan intimates, restless, desperate, rebellious and non-moral, then all his creative works in literature and art are but a reflection of his state of being. It also follows that the continuation of this type of literature and art - "the literature and art of pustulation" (" أدب البثور وفنها ") - is contingent on the continuation of the modern man as he now is.[36]

Khayyāṭa concludes his review of Lan with the unqualified assertion that al-Ḥājj is an honest product of his age, and that the 'battle' between him and his adversaries is not one between a 'sick' person and 'healthy' people; rather, it is between a sick person and others who do not have the 'luxury' (" نعمة ") of sickness - those are the type of healthy children who have not yet had the measles.[37]

Adonis (ᶜAlī Aḥmad Saᶜīd), the undisputed architect of the Shiᶜr movement, spared no effort to orient the poème en prose experiment properly, publicize it and write encouragingly about it in his letters from Paris at the time. In the course of juxtaposing traditionalism with innovation and radical catharsis, Adonis states openly that:

38 " أنسي [الحاج]، هو بيننا، الأنقى. نحن الآخرين ملوثون بالتقليد قليلاً أو كثيراً."

> ("'Unsī al-Ḥājj is the purest among us. We are
> in turn defiled more or less with traditionalism.")

The significance of this laconic reference to al-Ḥājj's phenomenon has been discussed earlier. Suffice it here to add that al-Ḥājj's introduction of a new style of expression and a new literary genre as well as his revolt against Arab thought and literature constitutes a total break with tradition whilst the rest of his fellow-poets and thinkers still oscillate between tradition and individual talent.

The Egyptian reaction to al-Ḥājj

The publication of the young Syrian writer, Hānī Mandas' essay on the poème en prose and al-Ḥājj's two volumes, Lan ('Never') and al-Ra's al-Maqṭūᶜ ('The Severed Head') in the Egyptian poetry review, al-Shiᶜr may be seen in retrospect as having come at the wrong time and in the wrong place.[39] The Editorial Board of al-Shiᶜr, either in line with literary orientation or in order to absolve itself of the potentially dire consequences, prefaces Mandas' essay with the following statement boxed and conspicuously centred on the page:

[40]

> هذا المقال لا يعبّر عن وجهة نظر المجلة، وإنّما
> تنشره عملاً بحرية النشر، وترحب المجلة بمختلف
> الردود التى تصلها.
> هيئة التحرير

> (This essay does not express the viewpoint of the
> review and we only insert it in keeping with the
> freedom of the press. The review welcomes the

the different rebuttals it receives.

The Editorial Board)

^{c}Abd al-Qādir al-Qiṭṭ, the Editor of al-Shi^{c}r, addresses himself in the following issue to this essay. Although he obviously tries to be judicious, it is apparent that he relies entirely on the scattered fragmented quotations in Mandas' essay, not on al-Ḥājj's collections - a fact that is likely to wrench those quotations out of context. Al-Qiṭṭ's commentary on the essay and on the value of the poème en prose in al-Ḥājj is not demonstrably written from the viewpoint of the eminent western-educated critic and professor of literary criticism; rather, it is written in the typically acid editorial style.[41] This poetry review was faced with a series of conflicts with the authorities, especially the poetry committee in the Higher Council for the Protection of Arts, Literature and Islamic Affairs. The observer of the literary scene at the time will have to take into account that al-Shi^{c}r was openly accused of promoting new and, therefore, anti-Arabic and anti-Islamic trends in poetry. Al-Shi^{c}r in this climate, and with a radical form like the poème en prose, had to guard both against further conflicts with the poetry committee and various reactionary quarters.

It should also be noted that waves of innovation originating in, or coming to Egypt from, the Lebanon, have been invariably misconstrued as hostile to the concept of Pan-Arabism on the ground that the Shi^{c}r movement, particularly in its first phase, was anchored not in the Arabic but the Phoenician civilization and literature. Although this 'charge' can be at least argued in the case of al-Khāl and Adonis, it does not apply to al-Ḥājj who, in a long poem " الحب والذئب، الحب وغيري " departs from the Phoenician myth of Tammūz,[42] which was Shi^{c}r's slogan at one point:

43 " أحترق لا أُبعَثُ، لا أُرجع لأُشنَقَ. أحترق وببرود أدخلكِ. "

> ("I burn not to be resurrected, I return not to be slaughtered. I burn and coldly enter you.")

Practically no one in either Egypt or the Lebanon paid any attention to al-Ḥājj's orientation outside the Tammūz-Phoenix myth, which was the rallying slogan of most of the Shi^{c}r movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Al-Ḥājj, on the other hand, is a rejectionist of a different colour: he does not renounce the Arabic legacy because it is Arabic, or seek the Phoenician civilization as a substitute; his rejectionism is primarily inspired by his unwavering quest for change, newness and candour.

In the wake of the Mandas' essay and al-Qiṭṭ's negative editorial, al-Shi^{c}r publishes a mediocre essay in which the Lebanese innovative movement and al-Ḥājj's experiment are assailed on national and moral grounds.[44] A year or so later, the review is seen as trying to redress the balance. A professor of French writes a well-informed essay entitled " مقطوعات شعرية " - a wittingly or unwittingly over-cautious heading ('poetic pieces or stanzas') for 'poèmes en prose' as it mainly focuses on Baudelaire's theoretical and practical contribution in this direction and gives a short historical account of the poème en prose. ^{c}Alī Darwīsh, the author of this essay, concludes by a selective translation from Baudelaire's petits poèmes en prose.[45] Similarly, Anwar Lūqā translates a short, yet pithy, study of the different forms of contemporary French poetry by Jean Maurice Gautier. It places French innovative trends, Surrealist poetry and poème en prose in the proper perspective.[46]

These two insertions could have been introduced to the Arab reader in Egypt quite indirectly as though to offset the negative reception of al-Ḥājj and the *poème en prose* on the pages of *al-Shi^{c}r*, and to make the reader aware of other national literatures' having undergone and/or currently undergoing similar phases of development and innovation.

Other Regional Reactions

In view of the references we have, we are given to understand that al-Ḥājj as well as the *poème en prose* has made a limited, but undeniably interesting impact on Iraq. An Iraqi writer admits, in a letter to *Shi^{c}r*, that the attempt to defend the *poème en prose* and assimilate it in Iraqi literature is a strenuous responsibility, and that it is such in the opinion of the "fossils of literature" ("أدباء الأتربة والرفوف "), who still cling to the companionship of ancient poets, forgetting our circumstances and place in the present civilization. He then adds: "I have written in [the Iraqi daily] *al-Mustaqbal* ("Future") a lengthy essay on the *poème en prose*, drawing on al-Ḥājj's Introduction to *Lan*. ... The responsibility, to repeat, is strenuous, but I shall defend the genre as best as I can because I believe in the reality of the *poème en prose* and its future."[47]

The Jordanian writer, ^{c}Imād Jumhūr, acknowledges what he terms as "the admirable rôle played by the innovative Arab belletrists and pioneers of the literary renaissance, especially the poetic renaissance through which the *poème en prose* emerged and became undoubtedly an important part of the history of Arabic poetry." Jumhūr gives the credit for the *poème en prose* to the *Shi^{c}r* review. He also contends that the *poème en prose*, which is regarded as a breaking away from the deteriorating Arabic poetry, has become one of the distinguishing aspects of the modern poetic renaissance.[48]

Phase III

A. The Steadily Growing Interest in the Genre

In the wake of the practical examples published in Shi^{c}r, and Adonis' theorization on " قصيدة النثر ", the genre begins to acquire wide recognition, and steadily popular interest, even outside the Shi^{c}r circle. In its summer (1960) issue, Shi^{c}r reports:

> [49]
>
> كذلك مازال الحديث قائما عن قصيدة النثر التى طالتها
> أبحاث المجلة وغيرها. وقد أخذ هذا الأسلوب الجديد فى
> الكتابة يتبلور، وتوطد مكانته على الصعيدين الفردى
> والجماعى.
> وقد جاء فى هذا القبيل كثير من الدراسات المنوعة
> له، وعليه، ظهرت فى مجلة الأديب، وجريدة النهار حيث
> أعلنت فى زاويتها الأدبية عن جائزة قدرها ٥٠٠ ليرة لبنانية
> تمنح لأفضل قصيدة النثر.

> (The talk still continues about the poème en prose, which has been dealt with in the studies as well as other features of the [Shi^{c}r] review. This new style of writing is beginning to crystallize and establish itself at the individual and collective levels. Several different studies for and against [the genre] have been featured in [the recent issues of] al-Adīb and al-Nahār daily, in whose literary corner a 500.00 Lebanese liras [=$178.50] has been announced and would be given to the best poème en prose.)

B. The Imitators of al-Ḥājj

The tremendous success of this literary genre in the hands of al-Ḥājj seems to have inspired many poets who were published in *Shi^{c}r* at the time. It was evident that in the 1960s, after the publication of al-Ḥājj's first volume, *Lan*, more *poèmes en prose* than *poèmes en vers* were inserted in the review.

Although it cannot be readily documented, al-Ḥājj may be said to have exerted direct or indirect influence on his fellow-poets such as a close friend of his and a member of the *Shi^{c}r* Editorial Board, Shawqī Abū-Shaqrā, who switched from the *taf^{c}īla* verse (a variation on the traditional *qaṣīda*) to the *poème en prose*. Abū-Shaqrā's volumes of poetry in this genre were published shortly after the successful *début* of al-Ḥājj in 1960, the fairly consistent theorization about the *poème en prose* in *Shi^{c}r* and the introduction of its major representatives in French poetry along with selected prose translations from their works. Another good case in point is what I contend to be al-Ḥājj's influence on the leader of the *Shi^{c}r* group, Yūsuf al-Khāl, but I shall defer this to deal with in the fourth phase of al-Ḥājj's reception.

The *poèmes en prose* of Ilyās Massūḥ, whose publication coincided with the growing interest in the genre at almost all levels, merit our attention. A random sampling of Massūḥ's poems, published in *Shi^{c}r*, may well reveal much more than a casual affinity between him and al-Ḥājj. Massūḥ's " ثمانى قصائد "[50] ("Eight Poems") do not only follow closely al-Ḥājj's phraseology and poetic technique, but actually bear striking resemblance to his temperament and intellectual preoccupations.

Phase IV

1) The *Poème en prose* Triumphs

Yūsaf al-Khāl, the senior leader of the *Shi^{c}r* movement, is at length persuaded to use the genre among other poetic media, thus according it his practical 'blessing.' It is worth recalling that al-Khāl's stand on the genre has undergone three stages: first, al-Khāl objected adamantly to it as noted above; secondly, he accepted it, on sufferance, in the practical contributions of Adonis and al-Ḥājj, and finally, he adopted the genre and used it with other poetic forms.

The publication of his *قصائد في الأربعين*[51] ("Poems at Forty") and the inclusion therein of a few *poèmes en prose* provided al-Ḥājj with the opportunity to review al-Khāl's volume and evaluate *inter alia* his experiment with the controversial literary genre. Now that al-Ḥājj has to his credit a published volume written entirely in this form, and that he has theorized copiously, besides the Introduction to *Lan*, on the genre, he assumes an inescapably authoritative tone in his critique.

The *poèmes en prose* in al-Khāl's volume fail to charge it with naturalness and profound thrust; rather, they are exhausted. Lack of diversity, the poet's deliberate successive gasping and unsuccessful style of punctuation, pausing and digression expedite the intrinsic attrition of these poems. The fragmentation in al-Khāl's prose is not only mental, but it is also stylish. I am even about to say that the poet's affectation of stylistic gasping is done to heighten the poetic temperature, and in keeping with the poet's belief that long context in prose poetry smashes tautness. But this, if my assumption be right, is an error in the understanding of the *poème en prose*. The *poème en* *prose* is broad enough to comprise all possible ways of expression: from simple and complex narration, transparent lyricism, to projection, genuine and prosodic "gasping."[52]

Al-Ḥājj goes on to assert that al-Khāl's attempt to draw close to everyday common language just as Pound and Eliot did in their 'cultural poetry' has proven a failure. His is still an elegant spoken Arabic and much closer to an intellectual dialogue than to a spontaneous attempt in which the biting, lively outpouring of speech intermingles with humour, irony and elegance of expression.[53]

2) Nizār Qabbānī and the *Poème en prose*

The *poème en prose* has been steadily gaining ground since the pioneering essay on " قصيدة النثر " by Adonis and the publication of al-Hajj's *لن* . It is no minor accomplishment that the genre has won Qabbānī among its general practitioners. This French-educated poet and diplomat who is invariably a best-seller and is readily regarded as the most popular and most widely read poet in the Arab world has enhanced by his practice the elitist circle of the genre and given it a popular dimension.

Qabbānī tried his hand at all poetic forms and moved from the traditional (*qaṣīda*) to strophic poetry, and from these to the new form of poetry based on the *taf^{c}īla* (foot) as its basic unit. Qabbānī sets 1966 or 1968 as the date when he experienced boredom with his customary poetic forms and consequently began to cast about for new ones.[54] Of the many statements he made on form and prose poetry, I find the following piece of relevance:

> I have realized that the strict line we used to draw between poetry and prose is only illusory and that the *poème en prose* which we previously disavowed, and the civil rights of which we ignored, and which we considered a child of unknown ancestry - this *poème en prose* has regained its legitimacy and its passport and become a fundamental member of the (poetry club).[55]

Qabbani's volume *مئةَ رسالةَ حُبٍّ* ("One Hundred Love Letters"), however, falls most likely under another category of poetic writing. His is not strictly a *poème en prose*, i.e., taunt, compact well-integrated poem, shorn of all rhetorics and ornament; rather, it is poetic prose, or at best dazzling raw material for poetry.

The point, however, remains that the veterans of the diverse forms of classical poetry have begun to review their conception of poetry and shift their critical position or poetic orientation under the general yet strong influence of this new genre and the considerable success of its representatives.

3) The Sworn Enemies of the Genre

Al-Ādāb which, as we noted earlier, consistently denounced the *poème en prose* and its representatives, has been persuaded, only in the late seventies, to 'change' or modify its stand on the genre. We should bear in mind, however, that *al-Ādāb* has not yet formulated a conscious policy towards the genre and its major representatives.

The Editor of *al-Ādāb* must have found it quite difficult to overlook his on-going feud with *avant-garde* reviews, especially with the now defunct *Ḥiwār*, *Shi^{c}r* and *Adab*, against which he launched a slanderous campaign of national and personal dimensions. In as recent an interview as the one conducted with him in September, 1978, Suhayl Idrīss, the Editor of *al-Ādāb* was criticised for his failure to acknowledge the "*poème en prose*;" which "has established itself and mapped out its creative existence."[56] Instead of dealing with the genre, he went over the achievements of *al-Ādāb* since its inception. Despite the fact that *al-Ādāb* has been on record as denouncing this genre, he strongly denies that the review was ever hostile to the *poème en prose*. He adds that due to the paucity of the good models of this genre, *al-Ādāb* did not publish any of the contributions it had received, and "consequently, we have the feeling, but this is not our conviction, that *poème en prose* [as genre] still lacks its knights, let alone its pioneers."[57] When Idrīss was asked about the poetic experiments and contributions of al-Ḥājj, Adonis, al-Khāl, etc., he answered evasively: "I respect their critical writings."[58]

Notwithstanding its vague policy towards the genre in question, *al-Ādāb* has started to publish *poèmes en prose* alongside regular verse. The insertion of such poems is, however, arbitrary; it is in most cases motivated by either the contributor's standing with the review, the topicality of the subject-matter or conventionally typographical arrangement of the material and not its intrinsic aesthetic value.

Although there was some debate on the *poème en prose* in the 1950s as shown elsewhere in this study, the publication of *Lan* in 1960 sparked off a critical storm over the genre, that was to continue well into the 1970s. Both before and after the appearance of this book in print, the critical approaches to the genre have been marked by two features:

(a) they have been largely negative, and (b) they have paid more attention to the formal aspects of the new genre than to its content. The *poème en prose*, however, has since gained currency even with tacit approval of those who opposed it vehemently.[59]

FOOTNOTES

[1] See Adonis, "فى قصيدة النثر" ("On the poème en prose"), Shi^{c}r, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 75-83. It was probably Adonis who arrived at the Arabic equivalent to the poème en prose - a direct translation of the French term. Adonis' poèmes en prose predate any published poetry of al-Ḥājj.

[2] Qaṣīda: the classical form of the Arabic poem characterized by consistent and uniform rhythm and rhyme.

Strophic form: though still written within classical conventions, this form allows a measure of rhyme variation. Rhythm, i.e., the use of one metre (bahr), is maintained, in all stanzas, unchanged.

"The Free Verse Movement:" is, in our opinion, a misnomer. Despite its apparent 'freedom' of classical conventions, it can be argued with good reason that the movement substitutes the taf^{c}īla (foot) for the metre. This limited variation in rhythm does not justify the popular terminology.

Adonis used this combined style in several of his poems. See al-Āthār al-Shi^{c}riyya al-Kāmila, (Beirut, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 511-521, 522-532 and passim.

[3] Al-Ḥājj, "Introduction," Lan (Beirut, 1960), pp. 8-9.

[4] Lan, p. 97.

[5] On al-Adīb's interest in the genre, see Shi^{c}r, IV, 15 (Summer 1960), 146-147.

[6] "Interview with al-Ḥājj."

[7] Al-Ḥājj, "Three Poems," Shi^{c}r, II, 5 (1958), 25-28.

[8] Al-Ḥājj, "Three Poems," Shi^{c}r, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 25-27.

[9] "Interview with Adonis."

[10] "Interview with al-Ḥājj."

Al-Ḥājj's statement that al-Khāl objected to the poems in Lan must be construed as al-Khāl's initial objection to al-Ḥājj's poetic writings before they were published in book form. Al-Khāl approved of the publication of Lan by Shi^{c}r and wrote a highly appreciative promotion of it.

[11] "Interview with al-Khāl."

[12] See, for instance, Shi^{c}r, I, 1-2 (1957), 25; 65-72; 13-14; 41-46.

[13] Al-Khāl, Adonis, al-Ḥājj were born respectively in 1917, 1930 and 1937.

[14] The cover blurb of Lan (Beirut, 1960). In spite of the anonymity of the blurb, we can establish al-Khāl's authorship of it on the basis of a one-line quotation from this blurb used as publicity for al-Ḥājj's second volume of poetry. The quotation is ascribed to al-Khāl.

[15]

ولابد لنا هنا من الإشارة إلى أن هذه المؤامرات كانت تعمل في ميادين كثيرة . وقد عملنا في هذه المجلة أكثر من مرة على فضحها في الميدان الثقافي حيث كانت تتغذى على يد فئة جعلت همها الرئيسي تهديم التراث العربي، ونشر الفوضى ، وبث "الرفض" ، وجعل التطرف والجنون شرعة لها ، وكانت تدعي إلى ذلك أنها هي التي تمثل حقا التيارات الجديدة في الأدب العربي. وقد كانت بذلك تشارك مشاركة فعالة في التمهيد لهذه المؤامرة المجرمة التي كادت تعصف ببناء البلد وتهدم أركانه.

Al-Ādāb, X, 2 (February 1962), 1.

[16] See Khālida Sa^{c}īd, " بوادر الرفض في الشعر العربي الحديث " ("The Beginnings of Rejection in Arabic Poetry"), Shi^{c}r, V, 19 (Summer 1961), 88-96.

[17] See *al-Ādāb* IX (Spring 1961) - quoted by Adonis, *Shi^{c}r*, V, (Spring 1961), 177.

[18] See Şabrī Ḥāfiẓ, " حول قصيدة النثر: لا شعر ولا نثر " ("On the *poème en prose*: Neither poetry nor prose") *al-Ādāb*, XIV, 13 (1966), 152-156.

[19] On all aspects of this debate including al-Khāl's summation, see *Shi^{c}r*, V, (1961), 182 and 186.

[20] Khālida Sa^{c}īd, " لن لأنسى الحاج ," *Shi^{c}r*, V, (Spring 1961), 149.

[21] Khālida Sa^{c}īd, " الهويّة المتحركة ," *Mawākif*, III, 17-18 (September - December 1971), 131.

[22] Khalida Sa^{c}id, " لن لأنسى الحاج " book review, *Shi^{c}r*, V, 18 (Spring 1961), 155-156. See also her essay " الهوية المتحركة " ("The Moving Identity"), *Mawākif*, III, 17-18 (September - December 1971), 131.

[23] " الهويّة المتحركة ," *Mawākif*, III, 17-18 (September - December 1971), 132.

[24] *Ibid*.

[25] *Ibid*. See also al-Hajj, *Lan* (Beirut, 1960), p. 104. Cf. the rest of this quotation: " أغرود فهذا هو. أغرود أو أخلد أو أنام "

[26] *Mawākif*, III, 17-18 (September - December 1971), 132.

[27] *Shi^{c}r*, V, 19 (Summer 1961), 88-96.

[28] *Ibid*., pp. 94-96.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 96.

[30] See *Lan*, p. 55.

[31] " بوادر الرفض فى الشعر العربى الحديث ," *Shi^{c}r*, V, 19 (Summer 1961), 96. The identity of the French literary historian, who wrote a history of Dada, cannot be readily established.

[32] Nihād Khayyāṭa, " رأى فى قصيدة النثر ومجموعة لن لأنسى الحاج ," *Shi^{c}r*, VII, 25 (Winter 1963), 99.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 101.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 100.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 102.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 103.

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] *Shi^{c}r*, V, 18 (Spring 1961), 181. See also " إلى أنسى الحاج " ("To 'Unsī al-Ḥājj"), *al-Nahār* (February 3, 1961) and (Beirut, 1972), pp. 267-274.

[39] Hānī Mandas, " قصيدة النثر فى لبنان " ("The *poeme en prose* in the Lebanon"), *al-Shi^{c}r*, I, 8 (August 1964), 64-80.

[40] *Al-Shi^{c}r*, I, 8 (August 1964), 64.

[41] " قصيدة النثر فى لبنان والثرثرة اللغوية " ("The *Poème en prose* in the Lebanon and Verbiage, [lit. linguistic chatter]), *al-Shi^{c}r*, I, 9 (September 1964), 10-12.

[42] The *Shi^{c}r* movement was referred to at its earliest stage as the

Tammūz or Tammūzite School because of its abundant use of the Tammūz and Phoenix myths, both of which are proper to the Sumerian and Phoenician civilizations. ʿAlī Aḥmad Sa^{c}īd has adopted the pseudonym Adonis, which is a later variant of Tammuz. *Shi^{c}r*'s earlier basic belief in resurrection after death in its broader implications stems from the Phoenix myth: "Legend has it that when [the Phoenix] saw death draw near, it would make a nest of sweet-smelling wood, and resins, which it would expose to the full force of the sun's rays until it burnt itself to ashes in the flames. Another phoenix would then arise from the marrow of its bones," J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York, 1962), pp. 241-242. On Tammūz and the use of myth in the *Shi^{c}r* movement in particular, see As^{c}ad Razzūq, *الأسطورة في الشعر المعاصر: الشعراء التموزيون* ("Myth in Contemporary [Arabic] Poetry: The Tammūzy Poets") (Beirut, 1959).

[43] *Lan*, p. 82.

[44] See Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad, " روافد ناضبة في الشعر الحديث " ("Barren Tributaries in Modern Poetry"), *al-Shi^{c}r*, I, 11 (November 1965), 3-15.

[45] ^{c}Alī Darwīsh, " مقطوعات شعرية ," *al-Shi^{c}r*, II, 14 (February 1965), 47-55. It is to be noted that Darwīsh uses, in the body of his essay, such expressions as " شعر بودلير المنثور " (p. 48) ("Baudelaire's prose poetry") and " المختار من أشعار بودلير المنثورة " (p. 52) ("Selections from Baudelaire's prose poetry"), while he consistently translates "*Petits poèmes en prose*" as " مقطوعات صغيرة بالنثر " a very awkward translation meaning literally "little pieces of prose," p. 48.

[46] Anwar Lūqā, trans. " أشكال الشعر الفرنسي المعاصر ," *al-Shi^{c}r*, II, 2 (August 1965), 47-55.

[47] *Shi^{c}r*, VII, 26 (Spring 1963), 145.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

[49] *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 16 (Summer 1960), 146-147.

[50] *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 23 (Summer 1962), 45-50.

[51] Al-Khāl, *قصائد في الأربعين* (Beirut, 1961). The volume contains five *poèmes en prose*, roughly one fourth of the twenty-two poems of the volume. The date of publication suggests that al-Khāl must have tried the genre much earlier.

[52] "مسيحية المنظور وعبثية الإيماءة: منذ *البئر المهجورة* الى *قصائد في الأربعين*" *Shi^{c}r*, V, 20 (Autumn 1961), 100.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] For these conflicting dates see his books *عن الشعر والجنس والثورة* ("On Poetry, Sex and Revolution"), 3rd. edn. (Beirut, 1973), p. 32 and *قصتي مع الشعر* ("My Story with Poetry") 1st. edn. (Beirut, 1973), p. 246.

[55] Qabbānī, *Qissatī ma^{c}a al-Shi^{c}r* (Beirut, 1973), p. 250. See also on this question [Introduction] to *مئة رسالة حب* (Beirut, 197?), p. 9 and *عن الشعر والجنس والثورة* (Beirut, 1973), pp. 31-34, where he discusses morphology in a similar vein.

[56] *Al-Ādāb*, XXVI, 9 (September 1972), 5.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[58] *Ibid.* Some of the poets referred to in the interview such as al-Māghūṭ, do not have any critical writings.

[59] *Al-Ādāb*, a staunch opponent of the genre, has been according, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, considerable space in its monthly

issues to what is probably assumed to be poème en prose. Al-Ādāb arranges these poems on the page with line breaks. These poetic writings are no more than either raw material for poetry or at best poetic prose. To mention only a few examples, see al-Adab XXIX, 9-10 (September - October 1981), 4-5, 14-15, 20-21, 30-31 and 48-50.

VI

CONCLUSIONS

A

The Renaissance in modern Arabic literature has meant two simultaneous endeavours: a revival of the classical heritage and a serious attempt to overcome the sterile literary inbreeding, which long retarded the development of art and literature under Ottoman tutelage (1300-1919), by conscious exposure to external influences. These attempts were to result in new and creative achievements. Of all the foreign influences, French and English literatures figured as the most prominent western influences on the growth and development of modern Arabic literature.

Before it reached the most recent phase of its articulation in the form of the *poème en prose* - the focus of the present study - modern Arabic poetry had followed a fairly long course of development and has been inevitably conditioned by a dialectics between the literary conventions of the diehard Classicists and Neo-classicists, on the one hand, and, on the other, the successive and/or simultaneous modernizing efforts of the *Dīwān* Group, the *Mahjarites* (the Syro-Lebanese *emigrés* in North America), the *Apollo* Group, the "Free" Verse Movement and the *Avant-Garde* Movement of the *Shi^{c}r Cénacle*

Arabic poetry underwent a rather prolonged transition period between the 1920s and 1950s, during which time Arab poets and critics became increasingly dissatisfied with traditional poetic conventions. It is arguable, at least, to trace this transition back to the early phases of the fertilizing contacts between western and Arabic literature during the French and English colonization of the Arab world in the closing decades of the 18th century.

Arab writers began to examine their literary legacy in the light of western literary currents, and, consequently, protest against the forms they inherited - a legacy that no longer manifested any flexibility or had any practical bearing on their literary sensibilities and socio-political conditions. They sought to articulate the inexpressible or to give an adequate expression to their own experiences at the individual and collective levels, which had long been obscured through the outmoded verbal standard devices and techniques. Reality as it was perceived and formulated was consequently questioned and rejected. There was, however, a marked fluctuation between a recognition of human frailty, of the absurdity of existing standards, objectives, institutions, and a yearning for a higher reality which was neither popular nor readily accessible. The dialectics between these polarities was to result in waves of literary experiments which continued well into the 1960s and 1970s.

Whereas the early intellectual unrest was evident in the two Egyptian movements of the *Dīwān* and *Apollo* in the 1920s and 1930s, a general air of malaise and dissatisfaction seems to have swept the major literary circles in the Arab world.

Although a few isolated individuals, like al-Barūdī (1838-1904), are credited with the attempt to rehabilitate the Arabic language, and revive, in their literary practice, the models of classical poetry, it is precisely in the last four decades that the search for new forms had become more pronounced and gradually organized. Writers groped in earnest for a new poetics and wrote manifesto-like prefaces to their *dīwāns*, where novel themes and techniques, alongside practical experiments, were outlined.

The *Mahjarites* in the U.S.A., the modernizers headed by ^{c}Abdul-Raḥmān Shukrī and the "Apollonians" headed by Aḥmad Z. Abū Shādī in Egypt; the 'Free' Verse Movement in Iraq; the *Tammūzites* in the Lebannon, and finally a relatively conservative version of the latter two in Egypt - all such movements, spanning 1920-1970, constitute a chain of poetic experiments, which shows a consistent, if not necessarily straight, course in nearly half a century of literary evolution.

Notwithstanding the marked distinctions in their literary and ideological background, these movements have been oriented towards the search for a modified, reformed, or new morphology to accommodate their experiences that cannot be fully rendered in conventional forms. Except where dictated by the present study, I have omitted to deal with the above-mentioned movements as they have already received ample treatment in various scholarly works.[1]

In view of the contemporaneity of and interrelationship between the 'Free' Verse and *Shi^{c}r* movements, scholarship on modern Arabic poetry fails to draw the line between the two. A preliminary distinction is, therefore, well in order in this place. The *Shi^{c}r* movement seeks to shape and establish a new '*cénacle*.' The leading poets of *Shi^{c}r* are revolutionaries who wish to cut themselves loose from the moorings of Arabic literary conventions and align themselves with the cause of contemporary poetry in the west. The 'Free' Verse Movement seems in retrospect to be no more than a bold variation on the traditional *qaṣīda*. Contrary to all claims, the poets of this movement have failed to bring about a new species of poetry; they all have conceived and experimented with verse based on the *tafᶜila* (foot) at varying removes from the classical *qaṣīda*. The movement accordingly constitutes an extension of traditional poetry, not a break from it. The inherently conservative nature of this movement foreshadowed its early stagnation and demise. It is not without significance to note that a major exponent of the movement, Nāzik al-Malā'ika, tried in her book *Qaḍāya al-Shiᶜr al-Muᶜāṣir* ("On the Problem of Contemporary Arabic Poetry") to canonize the movement in accordance with classical conventions and proscribe any tendencies towards radical innovations.[2] (Al-Malā'ika herself has retrogressed into a vocal reactionary poet, thus bedimming in the opinion of this writer her otherwise radiant and exceptionally talented contribution to stanzaic Arabic poetry.)

The 'Free' Verse Movement, which is a misnomer, relies structurally on the use of the single *tafᶜīla* (foot) as the basic unit, instead of a fixed number of feet or a combination of certain different feet per line. This *tafᶜīla* verse may or may not have rhyme. Within the compass of the movement, the poets vary quantitatively in their application of standard poetic conventions.

B

The phenomenon of the *poème en prose* as advocated and practised by the *Shiᶜr* Movement in the early 1960s cannot be said to have emerged overnight. It is not a startling innovation when measured against the background of the poetic efforts made by the preceding movements. All these movements called for and practised freedom from the fetters of classical prosody and the outmoded conventions of Arabic poetry, commonly known as *ᶜAmūd al-Shiᶜr*. The widespread use of prose translation from foreign languages and literatures, the experimentations of Rīḥānī and Gibrān with the medium of poetic prose and the concomitant theorization and literary criticism are undeniably among the factors that paved the way for the emergence of the *poème en prose* as a distinct literary genre.

It should be recognized that the 'Free' Verse Movement sought initially to dispense with classical and neo-classical rules governing verse and to substitute 'harmony' for 'melody' in the inner structure of the Arabic poem. By taking first the *tafᶜīla* as its basic musical unit, and secondly the poetic paragraph, the movement contributed appreciably towards narrowing the gap between prose and verse. Although the Arab theoreticians and poets did not overtly broach the rhythmic potential in prose, there was an implicit assumption that 'the other harmony of prose' is reconcilable with that of new verse. In order to draw closer to the workaday utterances of daily life, some poets tended to employ such metres as *rajaz* because of their decidedly prosaic nature.

The *poème en prose* as a literary genre has developed both outside the stronghold of Arabic Neo-Classicism and outside the confines of the 'Free' Verse Movement. The choice of the designation *qaṣīdat al-nathr* (which is a literal translation of the French technical term *poème en prose*) is made in open defiance to Arabic aesthetics, which is predicated upon the mutual exclusivity of prose and poetry. As an insurgent genre, *qaṣīdat al-nathr* has also escaped the Aristotelian rules underlying the Arabic literary theory throughout the different stages of its development.

Beyond the two statements on the genre--Adonis' pioneering essay

"في قصيدة النثر"[3] ("On the *poème en prose*"), al-Ḥajj's Introduction to his first collection of poems, *Lan*,[4] as well as the fragmentary comments and book reviews published in *Shi^{c}r*--no study has been attempted hitherto to develop a sound understanding and appreciation of the genesis, nature, and scope of the genre. The two introductory statements by Adonis and al-Ḥājj, though quite derivative and in the main apologetic, helped at the time to launch the genre into the literary circles and to illuminate some of its unfamiliar aspects. It would seem, however, that Adonis and al-Ḥājj must have found it far more persuasive to introduce Arab readership to their practical models of the genre than theorize about it.

Similarly, the *Shi^{c}r* review adopted a fairly consistent policy of introducing the major practitioners of the *poème en prose* in world literature in general, and in French literature in particular, such as Juan Ramón Jiménez in *Platero y yo*, and Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Saint John Perse, Michaux, Artaud, Breton and others. A good many of the Arabic versions testify to the strenuous efforts to keep the translations as faithful to, and as representative of, the original as possible.

The early *poèmes en prose* published in *Shi^{c}r*, especially by Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, Tawfīq Ṣāyigh, Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, Adonis (^{c}Alī Ahmad Sa^{c}īd), 'Unsī al-Ḥājj and Yūsuf al-Khāl, vary considerably in form, so much so that it would be indeed untenable to assume that they belong to one 'school,' or observe in their practice a uniform concept of the genre. Furthermore, any attempt to define the *poème en prose* would prove in this light equally difficult.

The structural variations in the practice of the genre admit of two distinct types of poetic writing. The first, represented by Jabrā, Ṣāyigh, and al-Māghūṭ, is not strictly bound by metre or rhyme. It is marked by the familiar typographical verse lineation on the page. Consequently the technical term readily applicable to this type is "free verse," not "*poème en prose*."

Jabrā defines his poetic technique in *تموز في المدينة* ("Tammūz in the City"), his first volume of poems as follows:

> In these poems, I may or may not care about *tafᶜīla* (foot); some lines are metrical, others are not. Some metrical lines may follow one another, but each has a rhythm within the poem, distinct from others. I may use rhymes or may ignore them as I see fit.[5]

The term " شعر حر " is a literal translation of "free verse" in English, and "vers libre" in French. It applies in the West to verse devoid of regular rhythm and rhyme alike, such as Walt Whitman's poetry and many others' in national literatures in European languages.[6]

The misuse of the designation " شعر حر " ('free verse') in Arabic poetry, already noted above, prompted Jabrā in 1963, a little belatedly perhaps, to set the record straight as can be seen in his rebuttal of al-Malāᶜika's assumptions about modern Arabic poetry, and his objection to calling the new poetry movement a "free verse" movement.

Jabrā and Ṣāyigh, profoundly saturated with western, especially Anglo-American literature, give the strong impression that they are writing English poetry in Arabic. This impression is much more pronounced in Ṣāyigh.

As for the unilingual al-Māghūṭ, he has distinguished himself largely as an imagist with a characteristic *élan*. His images are unique, fresh, sudden, and occasionally unrelated. The image, probably more than any other formal or thematic factor, confers on his poem an air of coherence and unity. Through second- or third-hand foreign influences, this poet oscillates between Symbolism and Surrealism, with a marked gravitation towards the latter.

The second stream, by far the more dominant and more influential of the two, represents a gradual progression from the classical *qaṣīda*, passing through the *taf^{c}īla*-oriented new poetry and culminating in the most recent phase of poetic development, namely, the *poème en prose*. Al-Khāl and Adonis have undergone the three poetic phases with varying degrees of success. Of all the younger and elder generations of the *Shi^{c}r Cénacle*, al-Ḥājj stands out as the only poet who has discarded the inherited conventions of poetry, and the only poet who writes exclusively in the *poème en prose*.

C

We have argued all along that the *poème en prose* as a distinct literary form has developed outside the stronghold of Arabic Neo-Classicism, and outside the inherently traditional confines of the 'Free' Verse Movement of the late 1940s and 1950s. The choice of the Arabic designation, " قصيدة النثر ," besides being a direct translation of '*poème en prose*,' is made in open defiance of Arabic aesthetics which has been invariably calculated to make prose as distinct as possible from verse. Arabic prosody, much like the French Alexandrine, has made for so long the separation between verse and prose so complete that the *poème en prose* has the function of a liaison.

It cannot be overstated that this literary genre owes its genesis and development to the vision and western orientation of the *Shi^{c}r Society*. The *Shi^{c}r* review introduced the major French masters of the *poème en prose* with representative selections from their poetry. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Michaux, Artaud and Breton, among other practitioners of the *poème en prose* from different national literatures were presented eloquently to the general readership of *Shi^{c}r*. The Arabic versions evidence the strenuous efforts to keep the translation as faithful to the French original as possible. *Mawākif*, during the last fugitive years of *Shi^{c}r*, and after its lamentable disappearance, has aimed at broadening the horizon of the new poetry movement. It has given the *poème en prose*, in particular, a new direction and fertilized it with mystical elements. Although much has been said about the cleavage between *Shi^{c}r* and *Mawākif*, owing probably to their respective philosophical and socio-political motivations, their common ideals of creativity, originality and universality bind them together and promote their intrinsic drive for innovation and transcendence.

D

Both Adonis and al-Ḥājj have been directly influenced, in their formulations on the *poème en prose*, by Suzanne Bernard's valuable study *Le Poème en prose de Baudeliare jusqu'à nos jours*. Both acknowledge their indebtedness to this work in public. Our review of their essays on the genre indicates that Adonis' and al-Ḥājj's approaches to, and reflections on, the genre follow closely Bernard's premises and conclusions. Of the two, Adonis would seem to have offered the Arab reader for the first time a fairly adequate survey of the theory, technique and salient characteristics of the genre, fusing his competent knowledge of French and Arabic literatures into a cogent thesis. In view of the paucity of critical material on the subject, we tend to believe that Adonis and al-Ḥājj must have found it more persuasive to put forth practical models of the genre than to theorize about it.

Al-Ḥājj, much more than his associates in the Shi^c^r Society, is to be credited with bringing the tradition of the poème en prose to public notice. The introduction of the insurgent genre has meant for him a sacred process of destruction, civil disobedience, and almost absolute anarchy as can be gathered from this quotation:

> [7] إن أمام هذه المحاولة إمكانين، فإما الاختناق أو
> الجنون ...
> ... ...
> هذه البلاد، وكل بلاد متعصبة لرجعيتها وجهلها لا تقاوم إلا
> بالجنون. متى تقف أيُّ محاولة انتفاضية في وجه الزبد يقاتلونها
> بأسلحة سياسية وعنصرية ومذهبية... لا تجدي غير الصراحة المطلقة،
> ونهب المسافات، والتغزل المحموم، والهسترة المستميتة.
> على المحاولين ليجبهوا الألف عام [sic]، الهدم، والهدم، والهدم،
> وإثارة الفضيحة والغضب والحقد ...
> ... .
> أول الواجبات التدمير.
> ... ...
> التخريب حيويٌّ مقدس.

(There are two possibilities before this initiative
[of establishing the poème en prose]: either

> suffocation or madness ...
>
> ... ...
>
> This country, and all [such] countries fanatically
> wedded to their reactionism and ignorance, can only
> be combated by madness.
> In order for any insurgent initiative to resist
> those who fight it with political, racial and
> ideological weapons--nothing other would help
> than absolute candour, tearing down the distances,
> feverish stricture, and desperate hysteria.
> It behoves those who seek to wipe out the one-thousand
> years [of tradition]--to destroy, and destroy, and
> destroy; to wreak disgrace, fury and hate ...
>
> ... ...
>
> Destruction is the first of [all] duties
>
> ... ...
>
> Destruction is vital and sacred.)

In our opinion, al-Ḥājj has been from the very outset a totally uncompromising poet and thinker, which may account, in part, for Adonis' complimentary dictum:

[8] "أنسي [الحاج] هو، بيننا، الأنقى."

("'Unsī [al-Ḥājj] is the purest among us.")

Like Artaud, and Breton's Nadja, al-Ḥājj seems to have gone right through the mirror as a payment for having listened to the voice of the unconscious within himself.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See note 50, Chapter II above.

[2] Nāzik al-Malā'ika, *Qaḍāyā al-Shi^{c}r al-Mu^{c}āṣir* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1962).

[3] Adonis, "Fī Qaṣīdat al-Nathr," *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 75-83.

[4] 'Unsī al-Ḥājj, "Introduction," *Lan*, pp. 5-15.

[5] Jabrā Ibrahīm Jabrā, "Min al-Mu'allif," *Tammūz fī l-Madīna* (Beirut: Dār Majallat *Shi^{c}r*, 1959), p. 7.

[6] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Al-Shi^{c}r wa l-Naqd al-Jahil," *Adab*, II, 2 (Winter 1963), 81.

[7] Al-Ḥājj, "Introduction," *Lan*, pp. 8-9.

[8] *Shi^{c}r*, V, 18 (Spring 1961), 181. See also Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi^{c}r*, p. 285.

VII

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VIII

APPENDICES

A

Al-Ḥājj: A Bio-bibliographical Note

1

Apart from the occasional and fragmentary information in the Arabic literary press, there is no study of al-Ḥājj where the chronology of his life can be ascertained and the essential details of his artistic development established. The substance of the present account is largely based on my interview of the poet, on the known dates of his publications and on the chance references made by the reviewers of his poetry.

- ʾUnsī al-Ḥājj was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1937.
- Finished his high school education in the Lebanese capital and took up journalism, thus following in the footsteps of his father, himself a journalist long associated with one of the leading Lebanese dailies: *al-Nahār*.
- An active journalist, al-Ḥājj is at present the literary and artistic director of *al-Nahār*--a convenient platform from which he addresses himself to the literary and socio-political concerns of the day.
- He tried his hand first at short stories, reportedly of ambiguous content,[1] and published his early experimentations with the *poème en prose* in *al-Adīb*, the monthly literary review which is credited with having been the first to champion and encourage this kind of literary innovation: the *poème en prose*.
- He distinguished himself as a dynamic and controversial member of the *Shi^{c}r* society and was on the Editorial Board of the *Shi^{c}r* and *Adab* reviews where he dealt with poetry and prose.
- The bulk of al-Ḥājj's poetry, that was to be published later in three volumes, appeared first in the *Shi^{c}r* review. Written exclusively in

the poème en prose form, his poetry is markedly Surrealist; however, it evidences an evolution from very pronounced Surrealism to a total dislocation of writing.

- Al-Ḥājj has translated copiously from French poetry. Among his translations are poems from Jacques Prévert (whom al-Ḥājj admits to have read immediately after high school),[2] from André Breton and from Antonin Artaud (al-Ḥājj's favourite poet). Al-Ḥājj has prefaced these translations with incisive and persuasive introductions to these poets and their art.
- He has adapted to the Arabic stage Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors and Eugène Ionesco's Le Roi se meurt. Both adaptations were done in the early 1960s.[3]
- Al-Ḥājj's interest in the Bible is reflected, besides his poetry, in his resetting of the "Song of the Songs" نشيد الأناشيد for a special edition which was the first book in the "Gems Library" " مكتبة النفائس " sponsored by al-Nahār Publishers, [1967].
- His volumes of poetry include
  - (a) Lan ("Not"), 1960;
  - (b) Al-Ra'ṣ al-Maqṭū^c ("The Severed Head"), 1963;
  - (c) Māḍi l- Ayyām al-Ātiya ("The Past of Days to Come"), 1965;
  - (d) Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta bi'l-Dhahab, Mādhā Fa^{c}alta bi'l-Warda ("What Have You Done to the Gold? What Have You Done to the Rose?"), 1970;
  - (e) Al-Rasūla bi-Sha^{c}riha al-Ṭawīl ḥatta al-Yanābī^c ("Inspiration of the Flowing-Hair Prophetess"), 1975.
- Al-Ḥājj is said to have written a book of criticism entitled, "Aspects of Contemporary New French Poetry." We cannot establish that this projected work has ever been published.[4]

- Al-Ḥājj's poetry in translation:
  - (a) " الكأس " "The Cup," from *Māḍi al- Ayyām al- Ātiya*, translated by Isa Bullata, *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975* (Washington, 1976);
  - (b) " الكأس " "The Cup," translated by M. Khouri and H. Algar, *Edebiyat*, 1-2 (1976);
  - (c) " العاصفة " "L'Orage" from *Māḍi al- Ayyām al- Ātiya*, translated "from its first draft"[5] into French by Nādya Tuwaynī, in *Les Cahiers L'Orient* 1 (January, 1965);
  - (d) " الرأس المقطوع " "La Tête coupée" and " المهرج " "Le Charlatan," both from *al-Ra's al-Maqṭū^{c}*, translated by Luc Norin and Edouard Tarabay in their *Anthologie de la littérature arabe contemporaine: la poésie* (Éditions de Seuil, 1967).

2

The trajectory of al-Ḥājj's poetics can be traced readily in his successive collections of poems, spanning the period between 1960 and 1975. These collections are *Lan* (1960), *al-Ra's al-Maqṭū^{c}* (1963), *Māḍi al- Ayyām al- Ātiya* (1965), *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta bi al-Dhahab*, *Mādhā Fa^{c}alta bi al-Warda* (1970) and *al-Rasūla bi-Sha^{c}riha al-Ṭawīl ḥatta al-Yanābī^{c}* (1975).

The Spontaneous or the Pre-Artifact Phase

The first volume, *Lan*, set the stage of Arabic poetry for a new birth as well as for a new orientation. It marks at once the climax of al-Ḥājj's rebellion, of his emotion, of his quest for a new form or formlessness. It teems with features of primordial spontaneity; of suddenness, unexpectedness, suspense; of protest, challenge and rejection;

of anti-establishment, anti-clericalism, anti-traditionalism, and, finally, with features of inevitable metamorphosis, of linguistic dislocation, and of sexual obsession--a Surrealist type of sexual obsession all his own. All these features abound therein and serve as the inexhaustible mine of raw emotions and raw images the poet is likely to derive from in subsequent works.

Al-Ra's al-Maqtūᶜ comes very close to *Lan* in its spontaneous thrust and thematic preoccupation. The form of his *poèmes en prose* or lack thereof constitutes a common characteristic that underlies the pre-artifact phase of al-Ḥājj's poetics.

The last three collections offer a practical illustration of the artifact phase. Indeed, we encounter the familiar *persona* of the poet everywhere: his images, thoughts and sensibility; his irony, rejectionism and defiance; his violation of traditional form, language and grammar; the circumference of his preoccupations, especially, the twin theology: "the theology of the snake" ("لاهوت الأفعى"), and "the theology of the stage" ("لاهوت المسرح").[6] But whereas these are no doubt stemming from *Lan*, and permeating the rest of his works, a new two-fold characteristic seems to polarize:

(a) The poet evidently imitates himself, i.e., as he presented himself in *Lan*, and fails to go beyond his earlier thematic and technical achievement.

(b) He imitates other Arab fellow-poets in some particular emphases such as the choice of themes, allusions, and the use of myth.

(In *Lan*, it is to be stressed, al-Ḥājj has coined his own private myth.) Al-Ḥājj also imitates Arab fellow-poets in the use of certain techniques.

His imitation is manifest in gratuitous references to classical Arab poets such as " أبو نُوَاس " (Abū-Nuwās), " أبو تَمَّام " (Abū-Tammām), " الحَلَّاج " (al-Ḥallāj), etc. and he would add his own poet-symbol, Henri Michaux. The shift of emphasis from his private myth to ready-made myths may be construed as a significant concession he is making to narrow the gap between his difficult and demanding poetry and the general readership.

In Lan and al-Ra's al-Maqṭū^{c}, al-Ḥājj is so obsessed with his own preoccupations and his Surrealist world that he does not have the leisure to use ready-made technical devices and thematic clichés.

Al-Ḥājj also comes under the direct influence of French poetry and poets, and, to some extent, under that of Anglo-American poets. From French literature, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Breton come to the fore; from Anglo-American, Eliot is seen in al-Ḥājj's newly-felt passion for repetition.

Contrary to strong evidence in his works, al-Ḥājj denies vehemently having been influenced by anyone.[7] His admissions, or autobiographical revelations,[8] his writings--with unqualified admiration and doctrinal adherence--on Artaud, Breton, Prévert; his side references to Michaux and Rimbaud, to mention only a few; his Arabic translations from the works of these poets--along with his own poetry which is the best testimony--all attest to the unmistakable French influence on al-Ḥājj.

The French influence in Lan is not readily identifiable. Nevertheless, it is felt in the air like a rare perfume; it is subtly interwoven with the fabric of his poetic experience. Breton's Surrealist doctrines, imagery and preoccupation with the irrational are detectable in Lan.

In al-Ra's al-Maqṭū^c, Rimbaud's colour Symbolism is quite pronounced.

Al-Ḥājj's indebtedness to French poetics, literary criticism and Bernard's formulations on the poème en prose is dealt with elsewhere in this study. Foreign inspiration and influence are at times so tangible that we are tempted to consider them direct translations quite alien and restless in their Arabic context.[9]

The form and related techniques in Lan are dictated by the poet's own experience and rejectionist stand towards the traditions of Arabic poetry. As such, the form of his poème en prose in Lan is both fresh and constantly developing. In later collections, the technique becomes gradually mannered, formalized and often predictable. Al-Ḥājj shows a growing tendency towards lineation, even towards the use of some traditional rhyme-scheme in Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta, although he seems to use the rhyme-scheme as an integral part of the general structure of these poems.

Al-Ḥājj's poetic experience is rooted in his permanent struggle with the word, with language. His quest for poetry proper is tantamount to the destruction of language barriers. Says al-Ḥājj:

[10] "ما أبسطَ الشِّعرَ الناعسَ فى الممكن النائم فى المستحيل."

("How simple is the poetry dozing off in the
possible that is dormant in the impossible.")

Al-Ḥājj would seem to have developed a vertical approach to language.[11] Some of the words he uses are rich entities in themselves, and these are few, whereas the majority of his words derive their richness from their interrelations in the given context.

12 اللفظة ، أيتها الأمواج الغبار الطائر الأزهار الألوان
أيتها الأشياء والعناصر يا أغصان النساء وغرف الحلم
والأحداق رؤى الجلاتين ، أيتها الدمعة اركضوا
إلى المجزرة قرقعة عظمي نشيد يقظتكم اقطعوا الشاعر
ونسله !

(The word, O waves flying dust flowers
colours O things and elements O twigs
of women and chambers of dream O pupils
of the eyes visions of the guillotine
O teardrop gallop to the slaughter-house
The cracking of my bones is the anthem
of your awakening Exterminate the poet
and his offspring!)

Al-Ḥājj's poetry is almost a venture into obscurity. A charitable, patient reading of al-Ḥājj would lead to a partial understanding of his poetry, leaving varying proportions of his thought and imagery for further equally patient attempts. The upshot of each reading is largely conditioned by whether or not the findings of the analysis correspond to the poet's veritable intentions, or at least to the approximate meaning of his poetry. The gradual, if difficult, unfolding of the poetic idiom, idea and image is typical of poets like al-Ḥājj whose vertical approach to poetry places them in a state of continued war with language.

The philological method which examines word sequence with a view to identifying key words that would help to unravel the intricacies of structure, syntax and imagery proves ineffectual vis-a-vis some of the vertical poems which, according to Breton, defy the dissection and reorganization of the poem. The majority of al-Ḥājj's poetry consists of open-ended poems whose words and images are markedly evasive.

Al-Ḥājj's 1970 collection of poems, ماذا صنعتَ بالذهب، ماذا فعلتَ بالوردة[؟] falls into two major sections. The first is entitled " أسير النهر " ("The Captive of the River"), and the second, " الكنار يُطلق النار على نفسِه " ("The Canary shoots himself"). Does this arrangement illuminate some of the dark recesses of the volume or provide any clues towards a better understanding and appreciation of al-Ḥājj's poetry? The answer to this two-fold question lies in al-Ḥājj's diction and the images it evokes. Al-Ḥājj uses the words "water" (" ماء ") and "river" (" نهر ") among other synonyms and closer related derivatives with marked frequency as can be seen in this random illustration:

أنظر إليكِ .
نهر . نهر دون علمي . 13

("I look at you.
River. River of which I am not aware.")

"أخذنى النهر ولم ترونى ." 14

("The river has taken me away and you could not see me.")

ندخر السراب . نغرق الجسور، نصنع 15
ماء النهر الجديد ...

(We save the mirage, we
drown the bridges. We manufacture
water for the new river ...)

16

ستندلق على ظهرك أقواس قزح. المياه تعلو
لكن سترحل تتأبطنى فوق المياه لأن فى حنينى
جراحك فلتبقَ.

(The rainbows will be spilled on your
back. The waters are rising, yet
you will depart carrying me under your
arm, over the waters, because in my
yearning are your wounds.
Therefore, stay.)

17

متعددة ومضمومة كالضوء
جبانة كالطوفان ... يأتى ولا يأتى ...

(Variegated and coalesced like
light[,] cowardly like the deluge ...
that comes and comes not ...)

18

حنان الأجيال يقطر منّى
فهل أخنق حبيبتى بالحنان وحبيبتى صغيرة
وهل أجرفها كطوفان وأرميها؟

(The compassion of [several] generations
flows from my heart,
shall I then smother my beloved with
tenderness and my beloved is young?
and shall I sweep her like a deluge
and cast her away?)

19

اتخزت الحب الشبيه ببر لا يحده ماء
الشبيه بمياه لا تحدها بَرِّيه

(I have adopted [a species of] love
that resembles a shore unbounded
by water, and water unbounded
by land ...)

20 وشَعَّ صوتكِ
هوينا إليه كمياه
صرتِ المياه .
صرتِ المطر ...

(And your voice beamed
we fell down to it like waters
You became the waters
You became the rain ...)

21 "وثوبها العارى يهدد كل نهر بالفيضان والحريق."

("And her naked dress threatens every river with
flood and fire.")

22 ذلك النهار جاء الطوفان وجلس. ولم تجد السفينة ماء
عملها. ولم تجد أيا منا لتحرمه الطوفان !

(On that day, the flood came and sat
down. The ship did not find any water
to carry her, nor did she find any
of us to deprive him of the flood!)

23 أنا وأنت والحب
حُبًّا يُعيد إلى البلاد الله
... ...
الزى ربطوه فى البئر كى لا يحرر الماء
... ...
الزى يولد من قديم جسدك وآتى أجسادك
الزى يولد عند نهر عاصمتك الزرقاء ...

(You and I and [our] love [that]
redeems God to the land
... ...

[God] whom they bound to the well in order not
to emancipate water
... ...

> [God] who is born of your past body and
> future bodies
> Who is born by the river of your blue capital ...)

The words "نهر" ("river"), "مياه" ("waters"), "طوفان" ("deluge"), "مطر" ("rain") among others seem to have lost their lexical signification in the poet's usage: they are reborn anew, and their rebirth is intimately connected with the poet's amorous life. Al-Ḥājj's poetical works, from his first volume, Lan (1960) to his most recent al-Rasūla bi Sha^{c}riha al-Ṭawīl ḥatta al-Yanābī^c (1975) show in varying ways and degrees of intensity that he is involved in perennial love.

The relation between 'water' and '*eros*' stems from their very nature. 'Water' suggests a wide range of symbols: birth, change, purity, susceptibility and femininity.[24] Whereas Freud interprets dreams connected with 'water' in terms of fertility and pregnancy,[25] Heraclitus telescopes the symbols of transience, metamorphosis and consequently death in his intriguing statement: "Into the same river you could not step twice ..."[26] 'Water' accordingly symbolizes concurrently the constructive and destructive forces. In The Wasteland, Eliot utilizes water symbolism in the section entitled, "Death by Water." Furthermore, the tradition of a life-bringing death-by-water is contained in the Christian sacrement of Baptism:

> So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were
> baptized into his death. Therefore we are buried
> with him by baptism into death
>
> (Romans vi, 3-4)

As for '*eros*,' it is marked by egocentric self-destructive love; it is inextricably bound up with '*thanatos*.' Al-Ḥājj synthesizes the analogous features of 'water' and '*eros*' in one image:

27 أَعْرِفُكَ مَلَّاحَ الفــروج "

("I know you [as] the sailor of the pudenda")

It is interesting to note that the ninth-century celebrated Ṣūfī Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī arrived in one of his divinely utterances (shaṭaḥāt) at a similar synthesis:

28 خرجتُ يوما إلى البادية ، وكان الحب قد أمطر ، وابتلت الأرض ،
فكانت قدمى تغوص فى الحب كما تغوص قدم الإنسان فى الطين .

(One day I went out to the desert when
love had rained and the soil was wet.
My foot consequently sank into love as would
a human foot into mud.)

Although the eros-thanatos dialectics permeates al-Ḥājj's poetic experience as a whole, it reaches the climax of artistic and emotional articulation in his fourth volume, Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta. If all else fails, madness is the last resort--al-Ḥājj has experientially discovered this principle and applied it in his struggle against the inherited conventions of Arabic poetry. Love is another front where al-Ḥājj invokes madness both as an ultima Thule and a benchmark of erotic intensity. The following example, in which he addresses his beloved, is how he unites the two:

29 التفتى إلى الجنون فى حبى حتى الجنون
وإلى الموت فى حبى حتى الموت .

(Pay attention to madness in my love
that borders on madness, and to
death in my love that borders on
death.)

The fifth volume, al-Rasūla, which consists of one long poem, reflects al-Ḥājj's aesthetic and psychological idiosyncrasies in a somewhat subdued vein, and consequently his preoccupation with the eros-thanatos conflict either recedes into the background or reposes behind a veneer of gentle lyricism.

30

هذا بحرك من مركبي الصغير، فانظري
إلى بحرك من مركبي وعيناك عليَّ
شراع.

(This is your sea from my little boat, therefore
look at your sea from my boat while your eyes
are a sail above me.)

The biblical influence that has accompanied his artistic career and found different expressions in his literary output, is more pronounced than ever in this volume. Al-Ḥājj here is consciously aware of the biblical model in the New and Old Testaments, and consciously attempts to emulate it. He opens his long poem with this line:

"هذه قصة الوجه الآخر من التكوين ..." 31

("This is the story of the other side of Genesis ...")

and uses it several times almost as a refrain. In the same way, the Logos theme of the N.T. becomes a way of seeing the reality through his woman.

"وعليكِ رأيت الكلمة ..." 32

("and, in you, I saw the 'Word' ...")

Towards the end of the poem, al-Ḥājj develops this theme more vigorously and more fully as though to renew his commitment to the avant-garde principle of rejectionism

[33] هذه قصة الوجه الآخر من التكوين
أكتبها
بحبر ضائع
أكتب عكس الكلمة
أكتب
عكس الذاكرة ...

(This is the story of the other side of the Genesis
I write it
with lost ink
I write it contrary to the Word
I write
contrary to memory ...)

The affinity, noted above, between al-Ḥājj and the Muslim mystic, al-Bisṭāmī is not a mere coincidence. Al-Ḥājj's poetry has evidenced all along strains of mysticism, and his continuous preoccupation with the erotic has conferred on his poetic experience, especially in *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta* and *al-Rasūla*, a deliberate *Ṣūfī* character. Like some mystics, al-Ḥājj, in his search for God, utilizes the woman motif as a path into the divine reality. While this theme receives adequate treatment in *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta*,[34] it is the central theme in *al-Rasūla* ("the prophetess"); the heroine in this latter work is characterized as "the other side of the Genesis," "the Logos," and "the heiress of the Glory that is captive in treasure-houses of the two Testaments."[35] Al-Ḥājj, however, is more explicit when he states unequivocally that the woman is his guide to God.

36

يذهب الناس إلى أعمالهم ومن حبها
أذهب إليك
حنانيك ربي جعلتني إليك
... ...
هي تقول فأقول المجد لك
هي تعمل فتجري أنهارك في قفاري
هي تنظر فأراك
هي تعمل فأتأمل معجزاتك
... ...
جعلتني إليك فاعترفت لك لأنها رنحتني
بالصدود كالسكارى ...

(People go to their affairs and through her
love I go to you
Have mercy, God; she made me for you
... ...

She says, then I say: Glory to You
She does, then your rivers flow in my arid lands
She looks, then I see you
She does, then I meditate upon your miracles
... ...

She made me for you, then I gratefully
acknowledged your existence for she has
intoxicated me with the Truth ...)

FOOTNOTES

[1] Shawqī Abi-Shaqrā, " قضاء وقدر لا موزون ولا مُقفّى " *Shi^{c}r*, IX, 33-34 (Winter - Spring 1967), 150-155.

[2] 'Unsī al-Ḥājj and F. Ṭrābulsī, " جاك بريفير: مختارات شعرية " *Shi^{c}r*, III, 9 (January 1959), 67-85.

[3] Al-Ḥājj's claim to have been the first to introduce Eugène Ionesco in the Arabic language ("Interview with al-Ḥājj," Beirut, October 3, 1974) should not go unexamined. His choice and translation of the Rumanian-French dramatist as a representative of the theatre of the absurd in French literature ties in with al-Ḥājj's early and profound interest in Surrealism.

His assertion that he was the first to introduce Ionesco in the Arabic language may well be true regionally, that is, with regard to the Lebanese theatre. Between 1960 and 1964, this *avant-garde* experimentalist theatre was among the predominant literary concerns in the Egyptian capital. Along with the translation of epoch-making, *The Theatre of the Absurd* by Martin Esslin, Beckett's *En attendant Godot* and Ionesco's *Les Chaises* were prepared for the Egyptian Stage. In 1962, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm wrote *Yā Ṭāli^c al-Shajara* (*Tree Climber*, trans. Denys-Jones Davies [Oxford University Press, 1966]) as his first contribution to the then new international theatre current, and by the end of 1964, Ionesco's *Rhinocéros* was translated and produced for an Arab audience (Maḥmūd Amīn al-^{c}Ālim, "Al-Khirtīt bayna l-Fawḍā wa l-Takhṭīṭ," *Al-Muṣawwar* [December 4, 1964]. See also al-^{c}Ālim's book, *Al-Wajh wa l-Qinā^c fī Masraḥina al-^{c}Arabi al-Mu^{c}āṣir* [Beirut: Dār al-Ādab, 1973] pp. 194-197).

[4] This said 'book,' "Aspects of Contemporary French Poetry" is variously referred to in *Shi^{c}r* as either "being written," "in the press" or "soon to be published" (*Shi^{c}r*, IV, 14 [Spring 1960], 105 writes alongside a photograph of al-Ḥajj's:

" أنسي الحاج انتهى من وضع كتابه: 'ملامح من الشعر الفرنسي المعاصر'. "

Under the heading " يصدر قريبًا " ["Soon to be published"], Shi^c^r, X, 3 [Spring 1959], 5 lists

"ملامح من الشعر الفرنسي المعاصر
دراسة: أنسي الحاج"

and adds that al-Ḥājj in this book treats of the French prominent poets and renders into Arabic selections from their poetry).

My correspondence with al-Ḥājj on this issue did not help much in establishing whatever had become of this 'book,' if anything at all. Al-Ḥājj, however, adamantly claims that he is exclusively a poet, and would not allow any other genre of writing to interfere between him as poet and his readership ("Interview with al-Ḥājj," October 3, 1974).

On the occasion of promoting al-Ḥājj's essay on Antonin Artaud, along with select translations from his poetry, which was to be inserted in the following issue of the review, Shi^c^r stated that this essay was from al-Ḥājj's book, "Aspects of Contemporary French Poetry" and went further to describe its contents in outline form:

[يرافق الحاج في القسم الأول من كتابه] بالتأريخ والتحليل، تطور الحركات الحديثة في الشعر الفرنسي منذ مطلع القرن العشرين، ويهتم بشكل خاص بالحركة السريالية، فيدرسها على ضوء مفاهيمها للفن والحياة، وعلى ضوء ما صارت إليه اليوم، وما غدت تمثله في أيام يبدو أنها تخطت هذه الحركة.

أما القسم الثاني من الكتاب فيدرس خمسة شعراء مع ترجمة نماذج من شعر كل منهم، وهم بول إيلوار، رينيه شار، أنتونان أرتو، جاك بريفير، هنري ميشو الذين يمثلون كل حدة اتجاهاً خاصاً في الشعر.

(Shi^c^r, IV, 15 [Summer 1960], 143-144).

> ([Al-Ḥājj purports in the first part of his book] to survey historically and analyze the development of the new movements of French poetry since the beginning of the twentieth century, and pay a special attention to the Surrealist movement as he studies it in the light of its concepts of art and life, and in the light of what

> it represents now at a time when it seems to have outgrown itself. As for the second part of the book, it studies five poets and presents translations from their poetry, and they are Paul Eluard, René Char, Antonin Artaud, Jacques Prévert and Henri Michaux who represent each in his way, a special trend in poetry.)

[5] 'Unsī al-Ḥājj, *Māḍi al- Ayyām al- Ātiya* (Beirut, 1965) p. 136.

[6] *Lan* (Beirut: Dār Majallat *Shi^{c}r*, 1960) pp. 66, 72. I have translated " لاهوت المسرح " as "the theology of the stage." This translation is too bland to do justice to the complex implications in al-Ḥājj's poetry. I offer here two alternatives that are, I feel, more congruous with the context: "the theology of histrionics;" "the theology of acrobatics."

[7] See "Interview with al-Ḥājj," (Beirut, 1974).

[8] Al-Ḥājj's rôle in the *Shi^{c}r*, among other things, was to introduce and translate French poets into Arabic. In his brief, yet most revealing, statements on Prévert, Artaud and Breton, al-Ḥājj registers his admiration and unqualified enthusiasm for the poetry and techniques of these poets. The unsigned translation of eleven poems from Michaux is very likely to be written by al-Ḥājj on grounds of style, intellectual and biographical emphases. See *Shi^{c}r*, III, 9 (January 1959), 67-85; IX, 35 (Summer 1967), 58-68; IV, 16 (Autumn 1960), 69-106; VI, 24 (Autumn 1962), 73-107; IX, 33-34 (Winter-Spring 1967), 191; VIII, 31-32 (Summer - Autumn 1964), 54-70.

[9] See, for instance, *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta bi al-Dhahab* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār li al-Nashr, 1970) pp. 13, 32, 62, 63, 67.

[10] *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta*, p. 111

[11] Henri Farīd Sa^{c}b makes a similar observation about al-Ḥājj's

approach to language. See his review article, "Qirā'a fī: Mādhā Şana^{c}ta bi'l-Dhahab Mādhā Fa^{c}alta bi'l-Warda," Mawākif, II, 10 (July - August 1970), 126.

[12] Al-Ra's al-Maqṭū^c, pp. 75-76. The quoted passage is so punctuated and vowelled in the original.

[13] Ibid., p. 23.

[14] Ibid., p. 55.

[15] Ibid., p. 17.

[16] Ibid., p. 14.

[17] Ibid., p. 42. The spaced dots in the quotation are in the original and do not indicate ellipsis.

[18] Mādhā Şana^{c}ta, p. 14.

[19] Ibid., p. 18.

[20] Ibid., p. 92.

[21] Ibid., p. 77.

[22] Ibid., p. 75.

[23] Ibid., pp. 87-88.

[24] See on water symbolism, J.E. Circlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), pp. 345-347.

[25] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, trans. from the German and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers,

[1955]), pp. 399-401, 403.

[26] *Heraclitus of Ephesus*, trans. G.T.W. Patrick (Chicago: Argonaut, Inc., Publishers, 1969) p. 94. See also on the river analogy *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, ed. G.S. Kirk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp. 366 ff.

[27] *Al-Ra's al-Maqṭū^c*, p. 14.

[28] Quoted in Sa^{c}b, *op. cit*., p. 128. See also a different version of Bisṭāmī's ecstatic utterance in ^{c}Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Shaṭaḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya: al-Juz' al-Awwal*, *Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1949), p. 142.

[29] *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta*, p. 31.

[30] *Al-Rasūla*, p. 13.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 11.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 70.

[34] See *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta*, pp. 14, 37-38, 65.

[35] *Al-Rasūla*, pp. 11, 14, 41, and 38.

[36] *Ibid*., pp. 50-52.

B

Interview with al-Ḥājj

An English Version of the Interview
I conducted with ʾUnsī al-Ḥājj, at
his office in al-Nahār Building, in
Beirut, on October 3, 1974

I. The Beginnings

Q.: Would you kindly bring into focus what you may well regard as the main lines of your literary growth and development?

Al-Ḥājj:

The first phase is characterized by a few critical essays I wrote and published in Shi^{c}r about new collections of poetry. At that time I used to write poetry strictly for myself on the assumption that it would not be well received by the public because of its newness. I used, then, to write poetry, and fold it up, and put it aside.

My first poems, published in Shi^{c}r, were negatively received. Both these poemes and the critical reaction to them are available in Shi^{c}r. Those early poems have not been published in book form. As for the poems of [my first collection] Lan, they were written between 1957 and 1959.

The storm Lan generated cannot be described as useful; it was no more than an offensive campaign. [Yūsuf] al-Khāl,[1] among many others, took a rejectionist view of Lan, and of the whole experiment for that matter. These critics, however, including al-Khāl, came eventually to terms with this literary genre [poème en prose], and experimented with it in their own poetry.

The literary critic no longer distinguishes between metric poetry and poème en prose. This kind of poetry was at once a triumph and a shock; it was something quite exotic to the critic, the reader and the poet himself.

I did not write the 'Introduction' to Lan for the sake of classification for I personally hate classifications. The nomenclature " قصيدة النثر " (poème en prose) has come as a response to an historical necessity; it is not an absolute or final delineation. It is merely an attempt to identify this kind of poetry, and to enable it once it acquires its identity, to dissolve into the sum total which is poetry. After all, there are no such divisions as poème en prose and metric poetry; rather, there is only poetry.

That precisely has materialized after strenuous efforts, and, I would almost say, after [my suffering] of extreme abuse. Today, I see and feel, with comfort, that what I have worked for, almost single-handedly, during those difficult years, has come to fruition, and that the poème en prose has been established as a poetic genre. It is no longer dismissed as defective (" هجين "), or thought of as an assault on the Arabic language. It is no longer viewed as a form of pedantry, or an easy way out of the difficulties of versification - an assumption that is in itself an error in judgement.

The poème en prose is difficult because [in traditional verse] singing is rhythm, and rhythm is the external music of verse. Conversely, the poème en prose substitutes for the external music, another kind of music, another structure, and a more intensive concentration of such poetic elements as feeling, imagination, and the use of the image, etc. In order for the writer of the poème en prose to deliver his poetry to the reader in an effective way, he should take pains to express himself in a more compressed fashion, because, in the poème en prose, there is no outward vessel like rhythm that mediates between poetry and the reader's ear.

The *poème en prose* has then become a *bona fide* type of poetry, and the question of form has become accordingly less central and less important. It is to be noted that 'form' was never an important issue in my opinion; it became important, however, after the publication of *Lan*. The criticism of, and reaction to, my poetry awakened me to the 'form' of my writing. I wrote my poetry in a spontaneous way; I did not seek [in my experiment] to surprise or shock [my readers]. I only wrote in response to my feeling and internal inspiration, for which I did not find an adequate form. The structure of *Lan* was dictated by my own feeling and inspiration.

The form has never been a problem, but the critics made it so. I was about to fall into this trap when I wrote my second collection *الرأس المقطوع* ('The Severed Head'), but fortunately I resisted the temptation as I did not stray away from my roots. I also realized that whatever others rejected or regarded as strange was not always wrong, even though I was not necessarily fond of strangeness as such.

II. Foreign Influences

Q.: Is it possible to trace the *poème en prose* in modern Arabic poetry? Its genesis in ancient texts such as the Old Testament? French poetry? While we are on this subject, have you been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the French example?

Al-Ḥājj:

I thank you for posing this question to me because it reflects a certain mentality in our midst, with respect to the study of our poetry and prose. This mentality tends to attribute Arabic letters to external influences. I appreciate this assumption and pursue it for the sake of truth, but I reject it wholeheartedly and most categorically if it is based on falsehood, or when it is the result of the ignorance of the critic who fails to understand the work and to criticize it on its own merits, and on the strength of its inherent values. Such critics would readily revert to foreign critical studies which are available in abundance, and are superior to Arabic critical writings. These critics thus mix up the original with the borrowed, and trace the original to unrelated roots, or attribute it to causes that have no practical bearing on it at least from the conscious viewpoint.

As regards your question about me personally, I was not acquainted with the poetic legacy when I wrote *Lan*. All the poetry I read was that which I had read in my secondary school textbooks. Basically, when I wrote *Lan*, I was twenty years old, and was just leaving school behind. I have not had any university education. Once I finished secondary school, I married and took up journalism to earn my living and live on my own. I have not had the opportunity of university education; I had not read any poetry before I wrote *Lan*. I wrote *Lan* as a spontaneous outcry both in content and in form; I wrote it in a personal manner that had no relation to any external poetic or cultural source. Even from the unconscious viewpoint, I had not read before *Lan* anything called " قصيدة نثر " (*poème en prose*). I had written *Lan* before I read foreign poetry. I wrote the 'Introduction' to *Lan* in 1960, whereas I wrote the poems of the collection between 1957 and 1959. I wrote the 'Introduction' in the light of contemporary writings that were recently published in France on this literary genre, especially the French critic

Suzanne Bernard's work on the poème en prose,[2] which is probably a more accessible study on the subject. I should like to mention that I did not come across this book on my own; it was my friend Adonis who referred to it before me in his essay on the poème en prose,[3] which was an adaptation, from this book. When I wrote the 'Introduction' I turned to this reference for some inspiration with regard to the definition and the classical traits of the genre. I did not consider this book sufficient, for my objective was primarily to open a window on this type of poetic expression, and to arabicize its name, not simply by translating it; rather, by relating it to the Arabic tradition. That was why I planned the 'Introduction' in such a way as to include examples from the Arab poets, and not only from Breton, Lautréamont, Michaux, Saint John Perse, or other poets from French and other literatures. I tried to trace the poème en prose to its Arabic roots since this literary genre is a fundamental pillar in Arabic literature. The poème en prose existed in Arabic literature even though it did not assume the same name [as is now used]. The roots of this genre, however, are scattered [in Arabic literature] and not quite clear. We should take the roots as our point of departure if we wish to consider the genre from an historical perspective.

As I joined afterwards the Editorial Board of the Shi^{c}r review, and participated in the [review's related] Thursday [Evening literary] activities, I found myself in contact with several names of western poets. I soon became involved in this atmosphere, and participated, in varying proportions, in the literary discussions. I belong to a class of people who prefer to listen when they do not have anything to say.

Therefore, the atmosphere of vital discussions promoted by the Shi^{c}r review helped me to come close to poetic knowledge. I am not a 'littérateur.'[4] Again, I do not belong to this class of people. If I had the choice between general reading and the reading of poetry, I would frankly opt for the former. Poetry reading causes me discomfort. This too would seem a frightening confession. But it is a fact and it serves no purpose to conceal it. I read poetry, but I would rather listen to poetry than read it. If I am to choose, I would rather listen. Nevertheless, I did read.

Q.: When?

Al-Ḥājj:

It was only recently that I was motivated to read not because of an inferiority complex, or for fear of any accusation of ignorance - such considerations do not concern me much - I was motivated to read in order to ascertain where we were, where I was, and to find out whether or not there were genuine values among poets. I had the time to reread the material I had read earlier in a cursory and artificial manner. I read a great deal and arrived at the striking results:

1. that poetry is exceedingly beautiful, and that it is about time that a pamphlet was written to serve the essential message that poetry of [all national languages] is beautiful;
2. that we have been markedly wrong in our common conceptions, in what we learned and what is being repeated day and night about the greatness of poetry outside our literature, in the present and in the past, etc. I was personally one of those who were dishonestly cheated. The fact should be asserted, however, that this inferiority complex

should not be continued as it has no validity to it.

I read all the writings of the three or four western poets who won the Nobel Prize in the last twenty years, and I realized to my shock that these writings did not merit the Nobel Prize in which we seem to suspect some value. (With regard to the committee presiding over it, doubtless the Nobel Prize is of some worth, although we confer on it some value it does not have.)

If someone told me so two years ago, I would have accused him of rigidity, madness, and national prejudice. But I am free of [any] national prejudice [when I make such assertions].

The unofficial Arabic poetry, the Arabic poetry which the ruling dynasties have not recognized throughout history until now - this poetry that has no place in main curricula of Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic age, the Arab Sufists until now - had the best of this poetry been assembled, and rendered into other languages, the genius of Arabic poetry would have been self-evident, and the era of backwardness would have come to a close.

We take backwardness in our Arabic literature for granted although we are not backward. There is newness in those [classical] poets. Although a thousand years has elapsed since their death, these poets are modern today, much more so than modern poets in Europe and in the United States. Both as poets and great prophets, they excel the western poets whose poetry we have memorized along with their biographical details such as all their actions, birth-dates, marriages, divorces, etc. We have memorized as though there were no other dates in the world [calendar], and thus neglected our own. Further, we have regarded these biographical aspects as criteria unto us to the extent that we have unjustifiably wound up losing our self-esteem. This is the highest degree of colonialism; it is the veritable phase of colonialism - the internal colonialism which is conducive to our disintegration from within.

As regards the Holy Book and the influence the Old Testament has exerted on my poetry, my answer is in the affirmative. Yes, I was influenced by the "Song of Songs" and by the general atmosphere of the Old Testament in my fourth collections:

ماذا صنعتَ بالذهب ، ماذا فعلتَ بالوردة [؟]

("What have you done with the Gold, What have you done to the Rose?") and that was simply owing to the fact that I had rewritten a year earlier the "Song of Songs" for the Nahār Publishers. The "Song of Songs" was published in a very luxurious edition, illustrated with fourteen coloured paintings by Paul Ghuraposian. I rewrote the "Song of Songs" and wrote a special introduction to it. My profound admiration was reflected in my subsequent work. This influence is evident in

"ماذا صنعتَ بالذهب ، ماذا فعلتَ بالوردة [؟]"

the opening and title poem of my fourth collection. The influence, however, did not go beyond this poem. Even this poem is not entirely modelled on the "Song of Songs;" it [the poem] merely has a few paragraphs that evidence a lyricism suggestive of that of the "Song of Songs."

As for my fifth collection, I am at present working on it, and cannot predict how the critical reception of it would be. In so far as I can be objective towards myself, I believe that the form of this collection draws as near as possible to the prayer form. Lyricism here takes its course without obstacles. In other words, it takes its course much more comfortably than before. I have arrived spontaneously at the form of the prayer just as I had arrived at my earlier forms of expression. I have invariably arrived at such forms in a spontaneous fashion. I arrived at the prayer form both spontaneously and through the experience I underwent in the last few years. It is a love experience naturally disposed towards faith. Love has led me to faith and Ṣūfism. I am not well versed in the Ṣūfist lore, and if you ask me to name a Sufist poet I would barely mention one.

One writer who submitted his thesis a week ago on the structure of the Arabic qaṣīda suggests, in the course of talking about my poetry, that I have arrived at Ṣūfism in my most recent poetry. On reading this, I have realized that this is so, although I had not been aware of it before.

Please do not accuse me of contrived naïveté; I am telling the truth. I had not known that my poetry was Ṣūfī-oriented before reading this writer's statement, which only after the writing of my poems alerted me that there was truly a Ṣūfī element in my poetry. It gave me a kind of psychological comfort to have realized that there was someone who discovered and identified this trait in my poetry without any conscious attempt on my part to write in this vein.

I arrived at the union with God through my personal experience and daily life, and love was the greatest medium that led me to Ṣūfism.

I do not want to finish up this answer without saying that I do not claim a hundred per cent poetic virginity, no one could lay such a claim. There can be absolutely no poet who has not been influenced by others. In this sense, I should like to repeat a statement I made in an interview conducted earlier with me, namely, "Every poet is all poets, that is, he embraces in him all the poetic legacy; from the very beginning he has been, wittingly or unwittingly and whether he likes it or not, tied up with an invisible wire to the tree of poetry. There can be absolutely no poet [who is] entirely free of "poetic kinship" as I do not like to say 'impression.'

As for me, I have not been influenced in the sense that, as poet, I would sit at a table to write having in mind a clear pattern of [another] poetry or a particular method, and telling myself the closer to this pattern my poetry is, the better, or the more successful, etc. I do not belong to this class of poets. I am not an educated poet in the sense of hoarding thoughts and aiming at a fixed philosophical objective, and crystallizing these thoughts in a poem. I am not of this species of poets. I am not, [however], passing any judgement, good or bad, on this class of poets. I simply do not belong there. I am a detached poet, all by myself, maintaining no relation to my contemporary fellow-poets. I have no relation to them from the perspectives of content and essence. I am perhaps the only poet whose poetry revolves from the beginning around love. There is no love in modern Arabic poetry - a phenomenon no one has noticed hitherto, although it is quite distasteful. Whereas there is no love in modern Arabic poetry, there are many issues [pertaining to national destiny] such as life and death, revolution, [classical] legacy, God as well as issues of politics and the [Palestinian] resistance among several others of such very sound issues. I do not pass any judgement here on these issues, but since this talk touches

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upon classification if you will, I would like to make it clear that I do not belong to these schools of poetry. I am the only one whose poetry has centred on love from the beginning until now. I say this neither out of modesty nor conceit, I say it as an established objective fact.

From the very outset, I have been a rejectionist, and I have been wild, and my line of development from my [first collection of poems] Lan until now has tended to move from abstruseness to lucidity, from complication to simplicity, and from fear of lyricism to lyricism without fear. Initially, I tended to refuse acknowledging love, and there was eventually no way out of confessing love. I have wound up resigning to love as a unique fact, which has led me to the Supreme Fact, namely, God.

Q.: If what I presume is right, how would you account for the proclivity of sadness in your poetry, and in your disposition during this interview generally?

Al-Ḥājj:

Perhaps there is no reason deep inside me for sadness, and I wish to say that this sadness fortunately does not accompany me always; it is caused by occasional writings about my poetry, and by a certain atmosphere in Beirut, and generally by the chaos of values we are witnessing at present.

Naturally, I do not go as far as to say that I am afflicted with a persecution complex. This I am not; I do not seek a reward from anyone. I have never expected a reward as authors usually expect in terms of critical reception and evaluation not to mention what they expect from committees and establishments. I am quite the antithesis to this. On this score, I am not deprived, and do not accordingly ask for anything.

I agonize, feel sad and furious when justice is shaken or is subjected to chaos and fraudulence. All this has been, for years, taking place in our literary, artistic, and intellectual circles. I do not want to expatiate on this subject. I wrote a bit on this question, but of course whatever I wrote was a drop in the bucket.

I do not know how to answer your question about sadness. I would like you to consider this matter as something unrelated to the scope of personal considerations. I internally thank you when you prompt me so to talk about justice and values.

I consider myself ill-treated, but I cannot consider myself the only wronged person. It is very likely that there are many more than I who are maligned, and who are much worthier of justice. These do not talk, or say anything. Certainly, they do not have the opportunity of meeting someone like you to understand their circumstances and find out the truth.

I too suffer from ignorance around me, ignorance galore ... I repeat that *ad infinitum*. I suffer from the chaos of values, chaos of sensibility, chaos of taste, chaos of publication, and irresponsibility. We should see the end of all these defects in order for the genuine values to emerge and the genuinely new poetry spring up and develop.

Q.: It is at least arguable that there is a marked difference technically and thematically between your first collection *Lan* and your most recent *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta bi'l-Dhahab*. Would you care to comment on this argument?

Al-Ḥājj:

In fact, every poet is an indivisible whole; we should address ourselves to all his works if we are to understand him fully. I say this while I am fully aware of my non-poetic dimension such as the essays and studies I have written.

I wrote copiously for the press, and still do, but I have not published any books other than my poetry collections, perhaps as a gesture of appreciation on my part both for writers and poetry.

If it is suggested that my development from Lan to my recent poetry is not clear, I believe that the reverse is more likely to be said. This development has been manifest from the start. Some critics say that the last dīwān, ماذا صنعت بالذهب represents the fighter's repose. What the critics liked and disliked in the last dīwān is neither a flaw nor a new discovery; rather, it is the process of evolution. As observed by some poets, I had two or three options before me: either to pursue my point of departure [i.e., the Lan technique] and arrive [safely] for merely continuing the style of my first collection to satisfy the admirers, or to follow my own course, my individual rhythm, my internal development, and the [dictates] of my modern experiences. I chose the latter. "Choose it" is not the right wording; I say now that I chose after it had actually occurred. I did not quite choose it; rather, I found myself spontaneously traversing this path. Fortunately, I did not choose the former path, perhaps because I have been, from the outset, a personal poet. I try to resemble only myself, for my poetry, as I see it, has a function, and that is to be I, to be exclusively I, not to play one of the rôles set by poetry critics. Therefore, I found myself spontaneously traversing this path of both simplicity and translucence and increasing lyricism. Had I followed the other path deliberately as demanded by some literati, I would have necessarily done myself and poetry a great disservice as I would have lost an intrinsic trait, namely, sincerity.

I cannot write, merely for modernity's sake, revolutionary political writings; I have no modernity complex. Poetry does not submit to rigid criteria, extrinsic definitions, and ready-made standards.

Q.: Two questions:

a) Why, in your opinion, did the Shi^{c}r review overlook Charles Olson's important essay "Projective Verse" despite its technical and thematic affinities to the innovative movement in modern Arabic poetry?

b) To what extent are you influenced by the Surrealist movement in French literature and/or by its protagonists?

Al-Ḥājj:

Shi^{c}r's attitude towards Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" is probably owing to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon literati, with [the review's Editor-in-Chief] Yūsuf al-Khāl in the lead, focused their admiration on Eliot and Pound, and did not pay much attention to other [literary] tendencies such as automatic writing and Surrealist theories.

My contribution in this respect was direct. I read Breton, and admired him as I considered him, and still do, the Eastern writer of French poetry, and I considered Surrealism an Eastern movement in the depths of western mind. Breton is the only poet whose works I have read in their entirety, both prose and verse. I was motivated to do so by a fundamental concern: never has Surrealism been mentioned in my presence since my early boyhood except in the context of sarcasm. When I came across the founder of this movement, I wanted to know the reason for this injustice [towards Surrealism]. Thus, I read Breton out of ardent zeal for justice, and I was overjoyed to have discovered for the second time that the world [around me] was ignorant and unfair, and that he who was scornfully neglected was just and right, and that accordingly he should not have been maligned by his world.

With this mentality, I translated into Arabic well over ten poems from Breton, and wrote a long study on him in *Shi^{c}r* in 1962,[5] and I think this is the first material ever written in Arabic on Breton as well as the first Arabic translation of his poetry. I do not believe that Breton has been translated into many languages. Unfortunately, my attempt to translate Breton has not stimulated similar endeavours in this direction. My involvement in the [Surrealist] question was an attempt on my part to get to know others.

As regards automatic writing, I believe it should not be adopted *à la lettre*:[6] it implies the way to spontaneity, and it may not be successful. Some such systematic subconscious [writing] is another type of the primary conscious or much worse.

Q.: As in other languages, diglossia in Arabic perpetuates the debate as to which medium to use in writing: literary or colloquial Arabic. What are your findings in the light of your experience in both genres: prose and poetry?

Al-Ḥājj:

I wrote some essays in the literary supplement of al-Nahār مُلْحَق النّهار الأدبي which caused indignation and divisions. I addressed myself to this linguistic issue neither to prove the impotence of classical Arabic nor to prove that colloquial Arabic was the substitute. The upshot of the experience has been that writing in colloquial Arabic is extremely difficult.

I was the first to translate Ionesco's plays into Arabic in the 1960s. I immediately discovered that it was impossible to write in Yūsuf Wahbī's Arabic. Accordingly, I used in my translation of Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors a median Arabic ("لغة وُسْطى"). I have refused of late to translate any works for the stage as it [the stage] does not tolerate any longer this 'median' Arabic. Although I am keenly aware that classical Arabic is not the language of day-to-day life, I cannot but use it in writing. That is why I am struggling with Arabic. Mine is an obscure poetic diction; it stems from my tendency to 'individualize' the Arabic medium. I have discovered as noted earlier that using colloquial Arabic in writing is very difficult because [our] subconscious is associated with classical Arabic. The closer the expression is to the sources of expression in the subconscious, which are the primordial sources of the language, the more radiant.

In a sense, this is why I say:

"انقلوني إلى جميع اللُّغاتِ
لتسمعني حبيبتي."

("Render me in all languages in order for my
beloved to hear me.")

I say in order for my beloved to hear me ("لِتَسْمَعِني") - not to read me ("لا لِتَقْرَأَني").

I am isolated on account of my poetry, not because of the content of my poetry, but because I refuse to follow a common current that would carry me to my readers.

There is too the problem of publication and distribution in the Arab world: If my book is better distributed, this isolation will not continue. Whereas I deal with the general and hot issues in my journalistic essays, I refuse to dissolve my poetry into poetic and political pigeonholes.

Breton seems to have succeeded in this respect when he reconciled Marx and Freud. His prose dealing with political issues is quite beautiful, but he fumbles and slips in endless errors when he approaches politics in his poetry.

Poetry cannot be deliberately proven; it can deliberately prove.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The major originator of the *Shi^{c}r* movement, and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Shi^{c}r* review. He also belongs to a senior generation in comparison to al-Ḥājj and Adonis (^{c}Alī Aḥamd Sa^{c}īd).

[2] *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1959).

[3] " في قصيدة النثر " ("On the *poème en prose*"), *Shi^{c}r*, IV, 14 (Spring 1960), 75-83.

[4] Al-Ḥājj's word.

[5] " أندره بريتون : ثلاث عشرة قصيدة " ("André Breton: Thirteen Poems"), *Shi^{c}r*, VI, 24 (Autumn 1962), 73-107. See also " ملك أبدي " ("Eternal King"), *Shi^{c}r*, IX, 33-34 (Winter-Spring 1967), 191. I ascribe this unsigned eulogy to al-Ḥājj on aesthetic and stylistic grounds.

[6] Al-Ḥājj's phrase.

[7] Yūsuf Wahbī figures quite prominently among the founders and pioneers of the Arabic, and more particularly, the Egyptian theatre. He wrote, translated and performed largely in highly literary Arabic.

[8] *Mādhā Ṣana^{c}ta bi'l-Dhahab* (Beirut, 1970), p. 18.

C

Interview with Adonis

Co-Editor of the *Shi^{c}r* Review

and

Leading Member of the *Shi^{c}r Cénacle*

Interview with Adonis,

a Leading Member of the Editorial Board of the *Shi^{c}r* Review

(N.B.:

a. Adonis is pseudonym for ^{c}Alī Aḥmad Sa^{c}īd. The Syrian poet and critic is more readily identifiable by this pseudonym.

b. I conducted the interview at Adonis' apartment in the Ashrafiyya District of Beirut, Lebanon, on October 2, 1974.

c. Translated below are relevant sections of the Interview that deal primarily with Adonis' rôle in the *Shi^{c}r* review and Society, with his contribution to the development of the *poème en prose*, and with western influences on his poetry.)

Q.: What was the significance of the *Shi^{c}r* review in your opinion?

A.: The significance of *Shi^{c}r* may well be summed up in five main points:

i. *Shi^{c}r* was a unique meeting place for the new poetic experiments.

ii. It was the first review [in the Arab world] that theorized about poetic modernity.

iii. Through its approach to the concept of modernity, *Shi^{c}r* formulated its position towards classical Arabic heritage.

iv. *Shi^{c}r* provided a platform for the interaction between the modern forms of expression in Arabic and western literary traditions and for the first time the Arab reader and the Arab poet in general were acquainted with examples of western and international poetry.

v. The last and more significant point is that *Shi^{c}r* was the centre of discovering the potentialities of the future of Arabic poetry.

Q.: In retrospect, how would you assess the rôle you played in the *Shi^{c}r* Society, and the contribution you made towards the development of the *poème en prose* in Arabic literature, as a literary genre?

A.: I devoted the larger part of my life, even daily life, to the *Shi^{c}r* review. It was I who undertook the introduction of European poetry, and more particularly French poetry which made the greatest impact on [modern] Arabic poetry.

I was in the forefront of the theoreticians who dealt with the relationship between the old and the new. As regards the concept of modernity, I have argued all along that it neither matters to abandon the old, nor does it matter to change the form of expression or the form of the modern [Arabic] *qaṣīda*. What really matters is to change the concept of poetry itself, and indeed this concept has changed.

I was at the time reading *Ṣūfī* writings, especially those of Naffarī and Tawḥīdī. I found in such [prose] writings what I considered superior to verse (" الشعر الموزون "). Today, after the passage of several years, I have become more convinced that this [*Ṣūfī*] prose is much better than much of the metrical poetry (" الشعر الموزون ").

I, accordingly, encouraged all writing experiments that broke away from prosody (" الوزن ") in favour of developing new styles, during which time 'Unsī al-Ḥājj was writing simple elementary prose pieces. In order to emphasize this trend, I tried my utmost to have ’Unsī al-Ḥājj published [in *Shi^{c}r*], and was met with strong objections from Yūsuf al-Khāl [the Editor-in-Chief]; however, I managed to convince him, and al-Ḥājj was subsequently published. As a further support of the [genre], I myself tried to write a *poème en prose* ("قصيدة نثر"), namely, "أرواد، يا أميرة الوهم" ("Arwād, O Princess of Illusion!"), which was the first *poème en prose* ever written in Arabic. This *poème en prose* ("القصيدة النثرية") paved the way for the publication of ’Unsī al-Ḥājj and Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ after him until the *poème en prose* became wide-spread and received full recognition. What I had struggled hard to establish was not that this form of expression was a European import as we were accused, but to link it directly with Arabic *Ṣūfī* writings. Today, I am more convinced of [the accuracy] of my earlier position even though it was not clear enough at the time. I can now defend it in its entirety on the ground that this species of writing was known in Arabic literature; it had been known in Arabic literature before it was known in any foreign literature without exception because Arabic literature is older than known European literatures.

We can assert today the the *poème en prose* or the [poetic] expression through the medium of prose is a fundamental [literary] genre in Arabic poetry; I can even assert that I myself am more inclined to express myself in prose than in verse. I can further contend that poetic expression through prose is likely to be characteristic of the next phase of Arabic poetry.

Q.: T.S. Eliot contends that "there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos." He also identifies 'free' and 'rhymed' types in English prose. Do you find similar types in the Arabic literary tradition?

A.: I believe that the 'modalism' (" النمطِيَة ") Eliot alludes to does not exist only in prose, but also in verse. 'Modalism' is a disease or an inadequacy resulting from the weakness or decline of the poets' creativity, for when creativity fades at any juncture writers take to imitating earlier models. This imitation is 'modalism' which exists both in verse and prose. It is easier, however, to combat 'modalism' in prose than in verse because verse consists of measured rhythms and it takes a competent poet to combat 'modalism' in verse. For these considerations, I regard what is known at present as 'modern poetry' as having undergone this phase of 'modalism' which is perhaps more backward than traditional modalism which we have complained of and broken away from. In fact, the 'modalism' of the so-called 'modern poetry' is about to put an end to the present wave of innovation.

Q.: Both in your studies about poetry and in the earlier parts of this interview, you argue that "what really matters is to change the concept of poetry itself ..." Is it possible to define this concept and assess recent conceptual changes in modern Arabic poetry?

A.: It is impossible to offer a final definition. One can attempt several definitions. Each definition will, however, reflect the viewpoint of the definer alone, and it is in this case confined to or derived from the poetic models the definer uses as his frame of reference. To attempt a definitive definition of the poem or of poetry is something unpoetic, something non-poetic.

I believe that the direction new [Arabic] writing is taking will entirely turn our [poetic] criteria upside down. Both in the classical Arabic tradition and in almost all [Arabic] "modern poetry" as it is called--meaning precedes utterance or phraseology. The 'modern' poet has always taken meaning on any given issue as his point of departure and tried to express this meaning or his [position on this] issue exactly as the classical poet used to portray or clothe in words whatever meanings he had in mind. This attitude is essentially rhetorical. The orator usually addresses people before him, and tries, first, to make a certain rhythm, that is to say, he should not be too fast or too slow ... he should follow a certain rhythm uttering alternately a short sentence, a direct sentence, and a clear sentence--and he should not be complicated ... These are rhetorical characteristics. Until today, we still write poetry in accordance with this perspective. Modern [Arabic] poetry, I believe, will be turned upside down. Meaning does not generate utterance; on the contrary, meaning results from utterance, that is, we write and the meaning subsequently follows. Once we achieve this in poetry all [existing] poetic criteria will change, and this is the approach to writing [proper]. In other words, I claim that we Arabs have not known writing. We are still in the rhetorical age. We write words, draw them [on the page]. We have not yet entered writing in its proper sense, neither have we known it. Naturally, it is not easy to deal with this problem in one session. A good deal of time is needed to study this problem thoroughly.

Q.: Is the *Shi^{c}r* review, in your opinion, the successor of *Ḥiwār* which had suffered--much like *Shi^{c}r*--from the very biased and personally motivated campaigns?

A.: We cannot put *Ḥiwār* on an equal footing with *Shi^{c}r*. The *Shi^{c}r* review has had a well-defined position, outlook, and mission whereas *Ḥiwār* was like any ordinary review. I, however, respect Tawfīq Ṣāyigh, [*Ḥiwār*'s Editor-in-Chief] and, as I know him personally, I consider him far above any accusations.

I dare contend that Arabs are about to lose even the "blessing" ("نعمة") of communication. In order to communicate, one should have, in the first place, something to communicate or to express. We are in the chaos of lacking what we want to communicate. We merely produce sounds. What we write is nothing but sounds.

We make noises and do not communicate. We certainly make noises and do not communicate.

Q.: Why did you dissociate yourself from the *Shi^{c}r* review?

A.: I argued for a new direction in *Shi^{c}r*, namely, the need to pay due attention to the history of the Arab world. In the earlier years of our work in *Shi^{c}r*, we turned our attention to the abstract theoretical aspects of literature, and I felt then that this end was accomplished. To continue in abstract theorization was to lock ourselves up in a closed circle. I strongly believed that if we did not give the review 'a new push,' namely, concerning ourselves with the historical dimension of Arabic life; in other words, paying attention to the Arabic daily lifestyle and political development, we would be still revolving in a closed circle. Even though I knew that the tendency I argued for was likely to lead to the disintegration of the *Shi^{c}r* from within, I went ahead, preferring this disintegration to the perpetual self-repetition inside the review's closed circle. There were, too, other less important factors. During the last two years of *Shi^{c}r*'s life, the choice of material for insertion was determined by the majority of votes, and I was of the opinion that poetry could not be determined by the majority. This policy would account, in my opinion, for the bad quality of the poems published in the review at the time despite my objections. I used, however, to accept open-mindedly the majority decision of the Editorial Board.

Q.: Could we possibly move now to the question of foreign influences on modern Arabic poetry and on you and your poetry in particular?

A.: I believe that thought in general is much like air, and the human being cannot help but inhale it. To influence and to be influenced--this is a natural question and a matter of course. What matters is that the recipient of [foreign] influence should give this influence his own personal stamp--he should digest it, internalize it and fuse it into the elements of his own experience.

In this sense, I can say that I am indebted to many Europeans. I am indebted in the first place to the Greeks: I am indebted to Heraclitus. I am indebted to Nietzsche and Rimbaud. I am indebted to all international poetry. I do not, however, know of one poet or thinker in particular who exerted any influence on me in a certain way. Whereas I acknowledge my indebtedness to the general movement of poetry and thought in the world, I cannot single out one thinker or one poet to whom I belong intellectually or spiritually.

Q.: It may be argued that al-Ādāb launched in the 1950s the Sartrian concept of 'engagement' or probably its own brand of this concept. What is your own attitude towards the 'arabization' of the concept? Is there, in the Arabic experience, what may be called 'engaged' poetry (" شعر ملتزم ")?

A.: There is a great deal of writing in Arabic on this question. Every literature by definition is naturally 'engaged.' I am inclined to think that 'engaged' literature ("الأدب الملتزم ") in the last twenty years was a provisional literature of no worth.

I believe that there is a revolutionary tendency in modern Arabic poetry. Here, again, you and I will differ on the meaning of revolution. Some say that revolutionary poetry is that which talks directly about revolution, i.e., it describes it.

In fact, all the so-called 'revolutionary poetry' took an attitude towards revolution similar to the attitude taken by the ancient poet towards caliphate. The ancient poet merely glorified the caliphate, the caliph and his achievements. Similarly, contemporary Arabic 'revolutionary poetry' takes revolution and the 'existing' system as an abstract idea, and accordingly glorifies the abstract notion of revolution; 'revolutionary poetry' adopts the stand of adulating revolution. This, in my opinion, is not revolution; in essence, this is not poetry.

'Revolutionary poetry' proper is that which flows from a position of conviction, of comprehensive vision to change the structure of

Arabic society radically and at all economic, social, cultural and political levels. Political change alone is not enough at all. If we confine ourselves to political change, the old maladies, as Marx would say, will soon surface. Therefore, genuine revolution would entail, first, the radical change of the social and economic structure, and secondly, the cultural structure, and, finally, the political structure as a crowning of this change. In this sense, I claimed that we did not have a revolution, and, in this sense, I now say that if we have any 'revolutionary poetry,' it is the poetry which derives its inspiration from this kind of change. This poetry, I am afraid, exists in a very small measure, and it is great poetry.

Q.: *Shi^{c}r* addressed itself on a number of occasions to 'diglossia' in the Arabic language. How has this linguistic phenomenon affected your literary experience?

A.: The problem of colloquial (" العامية ") and literary standard Arabic (" الفصحى ") is contrived. I have never used colloquial Arabic in my writings. I am not, however, against the use of spoken Arabic in writing. The distinction between the language of literary expression and the language of poetry will always be there in all languages. I am against this contrived problem in our literature. Michael Tirad writes in spoken Lebanese and very few understand him. Saint John Perse--if he is not the greatest of contemporary poets, he is one of the greatest--is only understood by the *élite*.

Q.: I should like to wind up this interview by asking you about the thematic foci in your poetry.

A.: I do not believe that there are 'contents' in poetry. I am against 'contents' and 'thoughts' in poetry. I write; then, critics and readers claim that I deal with this subject, that subject or the other. The themes that preoccupy me are those that preoccupy every human being: the problems of life and death. These themes are of no importance at all from the artistic standpoint. It does not matter at all whether one writes on love, revolution, or courage. What really matters is how one expresses one's personal experience and one's personal view and vision of love, revolution, courage, etc. Therefore, themes in the final analysis mean nothing to me from the artistic viewpoint. The greatness of the content or theme does not reflect positively, that is, on the poet or the artist. What makes the poet great is his manner of expression. As regards the other themes, I am engrossed like every Arab individual in one basic theme, namely, the question of the one Arab destiny.

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Interview With Yūsuf al-Khāl

Interview with Yūsuf al-Khāl,

Editor-in-Chief of the Shi^{c}r Review

(N.B.:

a - I conducted the interview at al-Khāl's office in Beirut, Lebanon on October 1st, 1974.

b - Only portions of this interview, that have practical bearing on the poème en prose, are translated below.

c - In his responses, Mr. al-Khāl uses an Arabic that is intermediate between spoken Lebanese and written Arabic.)

Q.: To what extent do you think Shi^{c}r has contributed to the development of modern Arabic poetry?

A.: Shi^{c}r has been instrumental in bringing about a fundamental change in the conception of modern Arabic poetry.

Q.: Would you care to define this "fundamental change," then place in perspective Shi^{c}r's attitude towards the poème en prose?

A.: It is established among Arab literary historians and critics that the new movement in poetry, which took place after the first [Arab-Israeli] war, and precisely in 1950, paid more attention to form by breaking the monotony of poetic conventions (^{c}amūd ash-shi^{c}r), that is, the metres and rhymes which al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad had described and classified. The new movement in poetry started from breaking this monotony and building the qaṣīda metrically or musically on the basis of the taf^{c}īla, not on the basis of the first and last hemistiches. The traditional *qaṣīda* departed from that somewhat as is evident in the Andalusian *muwashshaḥ* which was something of a novelty at the time.

The salient characteristic of modern Arabic poetry after World War II is that the poem is established on the *taf^{c}īla*. The *taf^{c}īla* is the key to the music of the poem. This limited development, which retained metre as well as Arabic musicality, moved heaven and earth ("أقام الدنيا وأقعدها"), and was considered absolutely objectionable by the conservatives. Although this species of poetry was metrical, the conservatives insisted that it fell outside all classifications of poetry because it was not patterned according to classical conventions.

After our appreciable success in adopting the *taf^{c}īla* as the basic unit of the poem, something that had existed before in the writings of Gibrān [Khalīl Gibrān], Amīn Rayḥānī and others, filtered through our movement - this was called either 'prose poetry' ("شعر منثور") or 'poetic prose' ("نثر شعري"). In the *Shi^{c}r* review, however, we published contributions by 'Unsī al-Ḥājj, Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, Tawfīq Ṣāyigh and Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā. These poets wrote poetry and we called it poetry; we did not call it 'prose poetry' or 'poetic prose.' This kind of poetry neither observes Arabic prosody of the classical *qaṣīda* nor follows the *taf^{c}īla* of the more recent phase of Arabic poetry. This kind of poetry has its own internal music; each poem has its own internal music effected by its writer, the free poet. We, the people in the *Shi^{c}r* review - welcomed this kind of poetry and called it as such, although we were primarily confined to the use of the *taf^{c}īla* as the governing unit in the poem instead of the set metres and rhymes. Objections from all quarters: the conservatives, the moderates, even the modernizers, were raised: "This utterance is no poetry. As for the *taf^{c}īla*, it is something we have understood and put up with but to regard unmetrical utterances as poetry is absolutely inadmissible. "In the ensuing campaign we were accused, the writers of the *poème en prose*, were accused and, because it published the *poème en prose*, the *Shi^{c}r* review was accused of conspiring against Arabic poetry and literature.

As for the *poème en prose*, it is not an invention of the *Shi^{c}r* review; no one has invented it in the Arabic language. The *poème en prose* is in fact a kind of writing that originated in France. Prose writing, prose poetry exists in all literatures. It exists in the Old Testament, even in the Qur'ān there exists poetic prose. As a literary genre, however, and especially after Lautréamont and Rimbaud had written several poems in it, it became well-known. They [the practitioners of the *poème en prose*] called it *poème en prose* meaning a poem in prose form, a poem that is not [presented typographically on the page] in lines [like verse], but it is written as a prose [unit] comprising the characteristics of poetry. After the genre had been long established in French literature, poets of all [national] literatures used it as their own medium until it came to us during the era of the *Shi^{c}r* review.

It is to be noted additionally that the poetry that we have dubbed as *poème en prose* does not qualify for this literary designation. The *poème en prose* is something quite different from the poetry of Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, Tawfīq Ṣāyigh, quite different even from 'Unsī al-Ḥājj's poetry although he is much closer [in his practice] to the [concept of] the *poème en prose* than the poets I have mentioned. The *poème en prose* is not every unmetrical poem, [accordingly] each unmetrical poem should not be called *poème en prose* (" قصيدة نثر ") as the *poème en prose* is something entirely different. For instance, the poetry of [such poets as] Tawfīq Ṣāyigh, Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā and Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, which is distributed geographically on the page in the form of lines - this poetry is like metrical poetry albeit of unconventional metre. Their poetry has internal rhythm attributable to [classical] verse, and cannot accordingly be classed under the *poème en prose*. Furthermore, when these poets [Jabrā, Ṣāyigh and al-Māghūṭ] read their poetry in public, they used to intone it. Tawfīq Ṣāyigh and Jabrā [Ibrāhīm Jabrā] used even to vowel their poetry, that is to say, when they wanted to pause somewhere in the poem they would place a *sukūn* [vowellessness] on the word at the end of the line, which proves their propensity towards the [traditional] tone. I have to add, however, that tone (" نَغَم ") is essential to poetry; it is one of its characteristics. It is not necessary for the tone to be traditional; rather, it is necessary that it be internal and personal.

To go back to the question of tone in Ṣāyigh and like poets, I should like to mention that I asked Tawfīq Ṣāyigh once, "Why do you pause with a *sukūn*?" (" لِيش مسكّنْ ؟ ") He said: "One has to pause." (" لازم نقف. ") This means again that Ṣāyigh was oriented towards tone in his poetry.

Q.: You, along with other members of *Shi^{c}r*, have dealt more than once with the question of diglossia (" إزدواجية اللغة "). How does this problem promote or hinder the process of poetic creation?

A.: We have invariably advocated in *Shi^{c}r* the use of an Arabic as close as possible to the spoken vernacular. We have also emphasized the need to keep in check the use of rhetorics, eloquence and hackneyed Romanticism. I have always regarded the word as a sacred entity that should be crystallized and used with precision. The proverb, "The best statement is that which is brief and meaningful" ("خَيْرُ الكلام ما قَلَّ ودَلَّ"), serves as our motto. The Qur'ān is the best example of conciseness. Conciseness is conducive to the desirable ambiguity in poetry. The poem so characterized acquires new dimensions in the audience's perceptions and lasts longer,

From the perspectives of diction, structure and ambiguity, we have benefited considerably from Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

Q.: It is reported in *Shi^{c}r* and probably *al-Nahār* that you are at present engaged in the revival of the Christian legacy. There is ample evidence in your literary output that you are influenced by the Bible from the formal and thematic viewpoints. Do you have any further comments on these interrelated issues?

A.: The Bible was translated, about one hundred years ago, in the simplest form of Arabic conceivable and the closest to the spoken vernacular. This translation was sponsored by the American missionaries and undertaken by Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Ibrāhīm al-Yāzijī and Yūsuf al-Asīr who participated in the translation even though he was a Muslim. This project was directed and executed by the most talented American missionary and physician, Van Dyck.[1] This translation has been in circulation until today.

A Catholic translation was done three or four years ago by Buṭrus al-Bustānī, the grandson of the older Buṭrus al-Bustānī. The latter translation is unfortunately marked by studied eloquence and rhetorics which distances it even from contemporary written Arabic.

There are several attempts to translate the Holy Book into contemporary simple Arabic. Motivated by the deficiency in al-Bustānī's translation and encouraged by the Vatican, the Catholics and Anglicans in Lebanon have embarked on the preparation of an Arabic version that would be satisfactory to the different Christian sects. I have the great honour to take part in the project and I expect the translation to be available in a few months.

As regards biblical influence, other writers such as Fu'ād Solaymān evidence great indebtedness to the Holy Book. I personally do not think that I am influenced by the Bible except in a very indirect way. My poetry is Christian and the content of my poetry is Christian but I am not sectarian. Conversely, there are many Christians whose content does not evidence their Christian faith.

Q.: What is your attitude towards the concept of 'engagement?'

A.: This problem is not clear enough in Arabic literature. You may be 'engaged' provided that you be guided by what Eliot calls: "the objective correlative."

I once wrote a very short poem of no more than ten lines, in which I addressed myself to the human tragedy. Very few people took it to mean that I was dealing with the Palestinian tragedy. I was surprised that only a few poeple understood it. It is sufficient in my opinion that one person is able to understand it as this in itself means that the poem has some value.

In this light, number does not matter much.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Al-Khāl doubtless means C.V.A. Dyck who, along with E. Smith, made an Arabic version of the Bible: *al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas, 'ay Kutub al-^{c}Ahd al-Qadīm wa l-^{c}Ahd al-Jadīd*, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1864-1865).